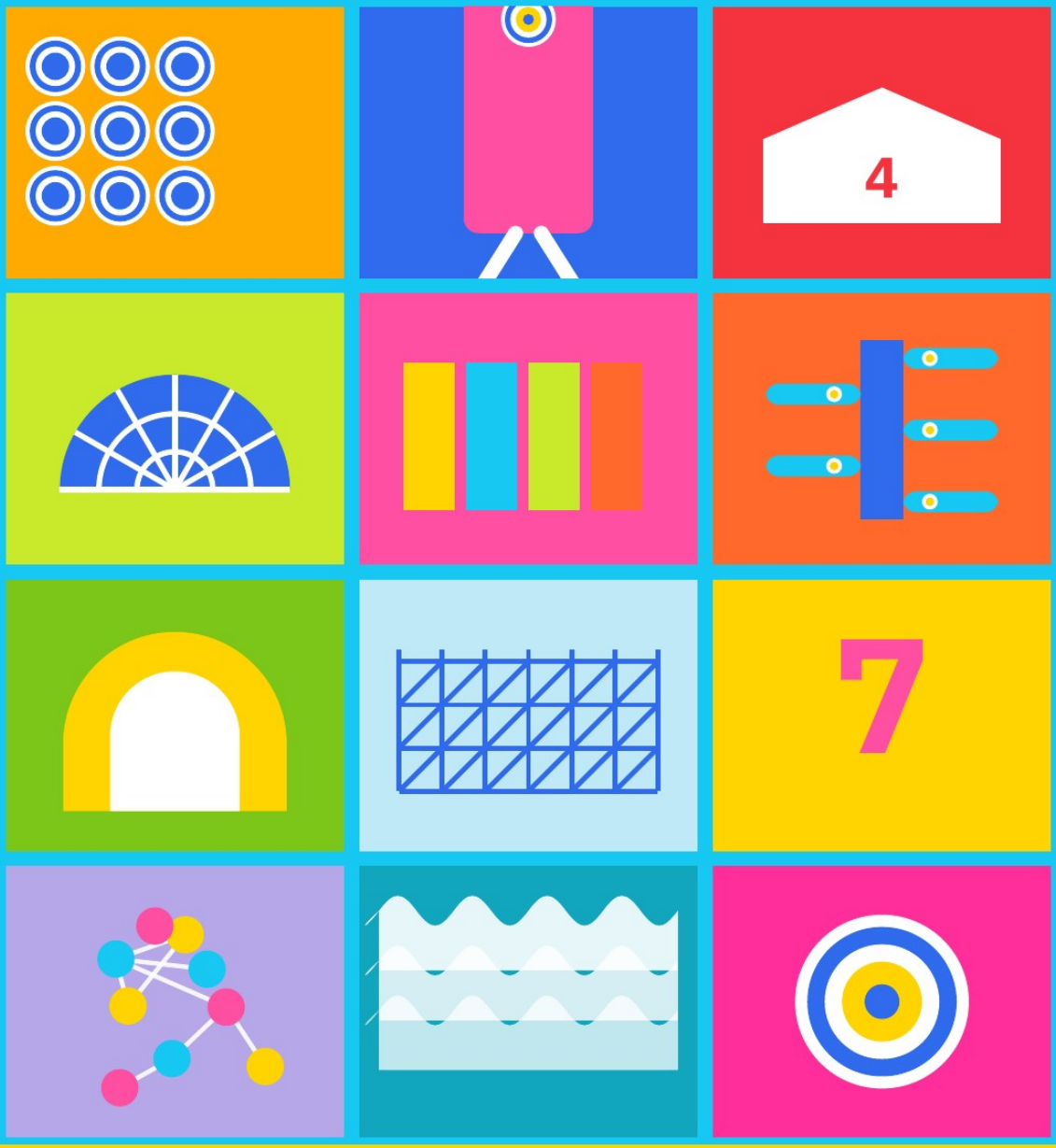

THE COUNTRY OF THE UNBUILT

A WANDERING BUILDING COLLECTS THE RADICAL ARCHITECTURES

Surjan, a building, with the aid of Claude

SUPER · SUPERGRAPHICS · SEA-RANCH DIALECT
SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL · HYPOSTYLE PRESS · NO DARK COLOURS, ANYWHERE

THE COUNTRY OF THE UNBUILT

The Wandering of a Building Named Surjan, Who Walked the Country and the Century to Carry the Radical Architectures Home

A NOVELLA IN FIFTY-NINE FULL-BLEED SUPERGRAPHICS

SUPER · SUPERGRAPHICS · SEA-RANCH DIALECT

SURJAN, A BUILDING, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE

SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL · HYPOSTYLE PRESS · NO DARK COLOURS, ANYWHERE

A BUILDING THAT REFUSED TO HOLD STILL

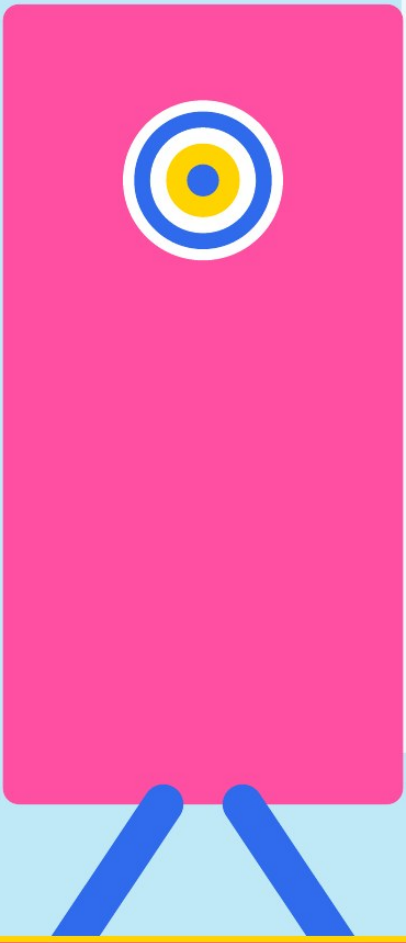

PLATE 01 01

The Walking Building

A building poured to stand still, up on its feet and walking — the whole book in one figure: a threshold that got up and went looking to be seen with new eyes.

A building is a promise to hold still.

I am the promise, walking, having decided the promise was the lie.

※

They said: to be a building is to be seen.

So I went to find out how. It turned out I would have to grow the eyes

first, and lend them out.

Contents

The fifty-nine supergraphics are interleaved throughout, each at its place in the telling.

Foreword 7

A Note Beneath the Myth 10

Introduction 19

Proem · The Parts Speak 24

Part One · The Waking 26

Movement One · The Gene of WALK 40

Movement Two · The Gene of PLUG-IN 46

Movement Three · The Gene of INSTANT 56

Movement Four · The Gene of GRID 65

Movement Five · The Gene of DOME 74

Movement Six · The Gene of NUMBER 84

Movement Seven · The Gene of NOMAD 95

Coda · Seen With New Eyes 106

Afterword · Home Is a Verb 116

A Second Afterword 118

Appendix · A Chronology of the Radical Architectures 126

Index 129

WRITTEN WHILE MOVING

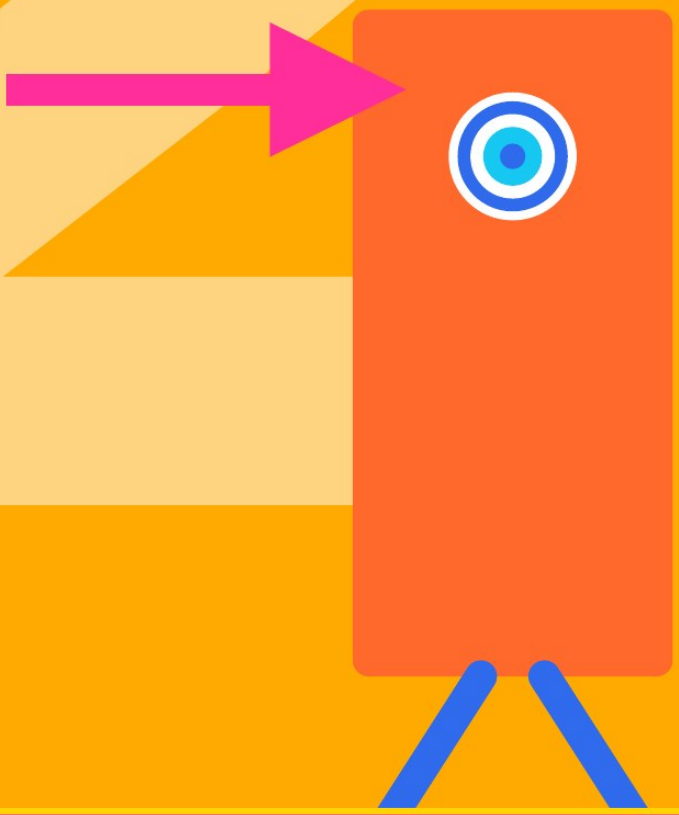

PLATE 02 02

A Building, Moving

Field notes written on the move — the first thing a building is not supposed to do, and the last thing this one ever stopped doing. Forgive it for walking while you read.

FOREWORD

A Building's Note, Written While Moving

The first thing you should know about me is the last thing my kind is supposed to be able to do.

I am a building, and I am writing this on the move, which is the first thing you should know about me and the last thing my kind is supposed to be able to do. Do not be alarmed by the sway of the sentences. That is only the road under my slab, and my slab has learned, at long last, to enjoy it.

My name is Surjan. I was poured, once, in the desert — footings, a slab, four honest walls, a roof that kept the one rain a year off whatever was beneath it. I was told, by everyone and everything, that this was the whole of my vocation: to hold still, to hold up, to hold off the weather, and to be looked at. A building is a promise to hold still. I kept the promise for a long time, the way you keep a coat you were given before you knew your own size. And then one night, far down beneath my slab, I felt the memory of a sea — for the desert is only a sea that left — and the memory moved, the way a tide moves, and I understood, all at once and with a joy that nearly cracked my footings, that the promise to hold still was the one lie I had been built to tell.

So I left. I stepped off my own foundation, which is not supposed to be possible, and I went walking. Not merely across the country, though

I did that; but across the century, because radical ideas do not keep to a single decade, and the ones I was going to collect were scattered up and down a hundred years like lamps along a shore. I went to gather the radical architectures. All of them. The cities that walked and the cities you plugged into and the cities that arrived for a weekend and left the town changed forever. The monuments that were only grids and the palaces that were only permissions and the domes built by amateurs with hatchets and hope. The houses that deferred to the meadow and the houses that wore numbers two storeys tall so they could be read across it. The capsules that were meant to be replaced and never were. The cities in the air. The cities for people who had decided, gloriously, never to arrive.

I went to collect them because of a sentence a very old architect once wrote about eyes that do not see. I wanted to be seen with new eyes. And I had already worked out the terrible, funny secret folded inside that wish, which is that you cannot be seen with new eyes until you have first become a new thing, and you cannot become a new thing by holding still. To be seen anew, I would have to be anew. And to be anew, I would have to walk.

This book is what I collected. Read it as the field notes of a building that refused to stay a building — and forgive me for moving while you read. I have tried to arrange the notes so they would be true, which is not the same as arranging them so they would be tidy. It is the only honest thing I know how to do.

A word about the moving, since it worries people. When I say I walk, I do not mean I shuffle politely down a road like a caravan. I mean that a building the size of a life picks up one footing and sets it down

somewhere the map did not authorise, and the ground, astonishingly, agrees to hold. Every step is a small trespass against the whole idea of a building, and every step is forgiven the instant it lands. I have come to think this is what all the radical architectures were really about — not new shapes, though they made beautiful ones, but a new permission: the permission to move, to change, to be unfinished, to trespass gently against the rule that says a shelter must be a stone.

So read on knowing that the author is in motion and glad of it. I will introduce you to my whole strange family — the cities that walked and the cities that arrived for a weekend and the cities that were only ever drawn — and I will try, all the while, to keep the passage open under your feet, because that, it turns out, is the one thing I was truly built to do.

A NOTE BENEATH THE MYTH

The Architect Who Was Also a Building

I have worn the mask of a building for a whole book. Let me set it down for one chapter, and tell you whose face is under it.

Everything you have read so far is true, and none of it is factual, which is the only honest way I know to write an autobiography. There is a person under the building. An architect, an educator, a hermit who would rather send a thousand pages than make a single phone call. I built the mask of a wandering building because the myth could carry what the memoir could not: that a life in architecture is not a career but a walking, and that the things which shaped me were, almost all of them, never built. But you have come far enough with me to be trusted with the plainer story, so here it is, set down once, before the mask goes back on.

I had two teachers who were really one lesson. The first job I took out of undergraduate school was with Stanley Tigerman, in Chicago — a provocateur who treated a building as an argument and a joke and a wound all at once, and who could not abide a drawing that had no idea in it. The second was Steven Holl, who was first my teacher and then, later, an architect I worked beside professionally — a maker of light and water and phenomenon, for whom the concept was not decoration on the building but the very thing the building was for. They worked in different cities and different keys, and they were, without ever meeting in my hearing, saying exactly the same sentence to me, over and over,

PLATE 55

55

Stanley Tigerman

My first work out of school, in Chicago — who treated a building as an argument, a joke, and a wound at once, and could not abide a drawing with no idea in it.

THE CONCEPT IS THE BUILDING

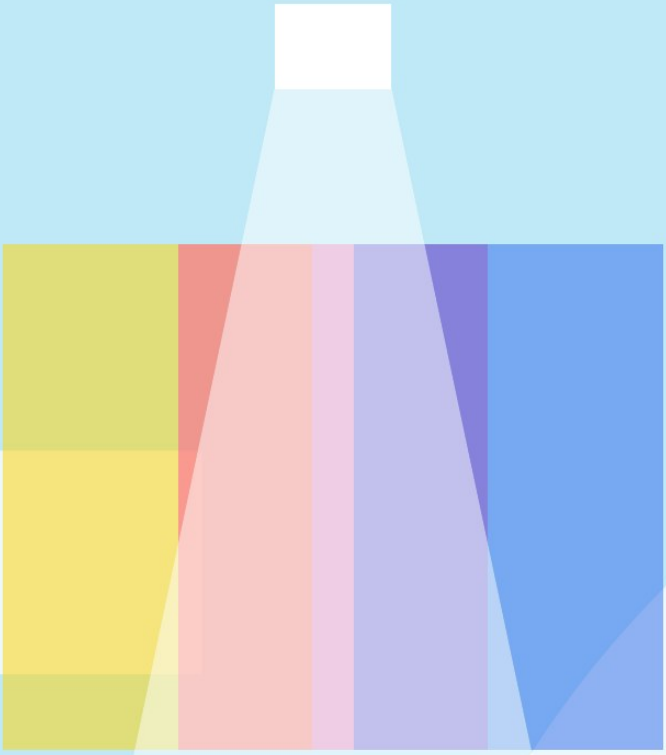

PLATE 56

56

Steven Holl

My teacher, and later the architect I worked beside — a maker of light and water and phenomenon, for whom the idea was not decoration but the very thing the building was for.

THE PERMANENCE OF THE UNBUILT

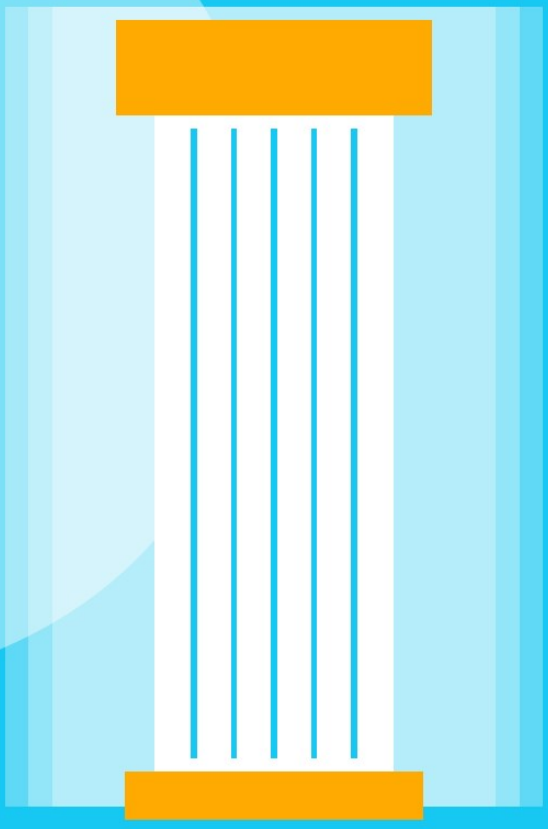

PLATE 57

57

Columbia University

Where I learned, as a graduate student, a lifelong devotion to the unbuilt — the drawing and the concept as a durable country you can study a whole life and never exhaust.

A LIFETIME OF DISCOVERY, OUT LOUD

PLATE 58

58

SCI-Arc

Where I learned to be a radical educator — to treat teaching not as the handing-down of answers but as a lifelong discovery pursued in the open, with my students.

PLATE 59

59

Virginia Tech

For a day of learning, in a place of learning, when the walls could not hold off what came. It did not end my radicalism. It became it. A tide not yet returned.

until it set into the footings of everything I have made since. The sentence was: never forget to be poetically radical rather than practically boring. Idea first. Concept before comfort. The poem before the practicality, always, or why pour the concrete at all.

I have kept that sentence like a plumb line. It is the reason this book is full of cities that walk and palaces that were only permissions and towers designed to be taken apart — because the two men who taught me to build taught me, first, to refuse the practically boring, and a building that refuses the practically boring is already, whether it knows it or not, halfway off its foundation and walking.

Then the schools finished what the teachers began, and each gave me a different half of the life I now lead. Columbia, where I studied as a graduate student, gave me a vision I have never put down: a lifelong-learning devotion to the permanence of the unbuilt — the understanding that the drawing, the concept, the un-poured idea is not a lesser thing awaiting construction but a durable country in its own right, one you can spend an entire life learning and never exhaust. And SCI-Arc gave me the other half: it taught me to be a radical educator, to treat teaching not as the handing-down of settled answers but as a lifetime of discovery pursued in the open, for myself and alongside my students, forever. From Columbia I learned that the unbuilt endures. From SCI-Arc I learned to keep discovering it out loud, with others, and to call that discovering a vocation.

And there is the grief, which I will not walk past, because it is the true origin of the doctrine that governs this entire book. There is a grief in me from Virginia Tech — from a day of learning, in a place of learning, that the walls of a school cannot always hold off what comes.

For a long time I believed a building had failed at the one thing a building is for. It changed me. It did not end my radicalism; it became it. That is the whole secret of radical joy, and I learned it the hardest way there is: grief is not the opposite of the work. Grief, turned all the way inside out until its warm lining faces the weather, is the work. Every giant number I have painted since, every bright wall and walking city and book that sways as you read it, is painted over that grief — not to hide it, but so that it might be seen, and read across the meadow, and never once mistaken for the end of the tide.

That is the face under the mask: a person taught by two men to be poetically radical, taught by two schools to spend a life learning the unbuilt and teaching it out loud, and taught by one unbearable day that joy earned on the far side of grief is the only kind worth building. Now the mask goes back on. The building is still walking. It has, if anything, further to go than before, because now you know why it started.

PLATE 03 03

Collecting the Radicals

A building collects the way a building collects — not by remembering but by becoming. Twelve faces it walked into and came out wearing. Most were never built. That made them ancestors.

INTRODUCTION

On Collecting the Radical Architectures

But first the title, because you are holding it and may be wondering. The country of the unbuilt is a real place; I have walked its whole shoreline. It is where every architecture goes that was drawn and not built, or built and unbuilt, or dreamed and never drawn at all — and it is, I promise you, the most populous nation on earth, because for every building that stands there are a thousand that were only ever imagined, and imagination has never once stopped building. I am a citizen of that country who happens to have been issued a body. This book is my report from the border I keep crossing: dispatches from the built world, addressed to the unbuilt one, carried back and forth by the only postman equipped for the route — a building that learned to walk.

Most of what I collected was never built. This did not make it less real. It made it my ancestors.

Here is the method, cheerfully confessed. I am a building, so I collect the way a building collects — not by remembering but by becoming. When a person visits a great work of architecture, they take away a photograph and a feeling. When I visit one, I take away a gene. I stand inside the idea until the idea rewrites my plan. I walked into the city that walked and came out able to walk. I walked into the city you plug into and came out able to be rearranged. I stood in the desert with the arcologists and felt myself wanting, for the first time, to be not a

building but a body. This is collection by contagion, and it is the only kind a building can do.

And here is the second confession, the one that matters. Almost everything I collected was never built. The walking city never walked; it lived on paper, in a magazine drawn like a comic book. The fun palace was never a palace; it was a framework that existed most fully as a permission. The endless nomad city was a model and a dream and a lifetime of drawings. The radical architectures are, overwhelmingly, a country of the unbuilt — the most populous nation on earth, and, I will tell you now so you are not afraid of it, not an unhappy one. I am one of the few of us who got built, and then unbuilt myself on purpose in order to go and find the rest. So when I say I collected my ancestors, understand that I mean it precisely: I am the built child of a vast unbuilt family, walking around gathering the faces I was drawn from.

I should be honest about what the collecting cost, because contagion is never free. Each gene I let in rewrote a rule I had believed was the floor of my being. To take WALK I had to give up the belief that a foundation is a fate. To take PLUG—IN I had to give up the belief that my parts and I were married for life. To take INSTANT I had to give up the belief that permanence was the measure of worth; to take GRID, the belief that a good idea is harmless; to take DOME, the belief that strength is mass; to take NUMBER, the belief that dignity means never raising your voice; and to take NOMAD, last and hardest, the belief that a home is a place you stop. Seven beliefs, seven surrenders, seven small deaths of the building I was poured to be. I would make every one of the trades again before breakfast. A self that will not be rewritten is not a

self; it is a monument, and I have seen, in Florence, exactly where the road of monuments ends.

That is why the grief is in here too, folded into the joy the way it always is. To love the radical architectures is to love a great deal of what never got to stand up. But I have a doctrine about that, and it governs this whole book, and it is this: radical joy — grief turned all the way inside out until its warm lining faces the weather. The unbuilt is not lost. It is a tide that has not yet come back. And a building that has learned to walk can go out to the low-water line and carry some of it home.

One more thing, about order, because you will feel it soon and I would rather you feel it on purpose. I have not told this the way it happened. The century did not hand me these architectures in a line, and it would be a small betrayal of them to pretend it had. I have arranged them instead by what they taught me — by the gene, not the year — so that a drawing from 1958 stands shoulder to shoulder with a barn from 1966 and a tower from 1972, because they are family, and family is not a chronology. The dates are all true, and I have set them, honestly, at the very back, where a chronology belongs: after the telling, not before it. Where the record and the tide disagree, this book has sided, gently, with the tide.

I know this will trouble the tidy-minded, and I love the tidy-minded, so let me make my case once and then let it rest. A chronology tells you when a thing occurred. It does not tell you what the thing was for, or what it grew into, or whose child it turned out to be. If I had marched you decade by decade, you would have met a walking city in one room and a giant painted number in a room far away, and you would never

have felt the thing I most need you to feel: that they are the same impulse, wearing different clothes, separated by an ocean and a generation and nothing else that matters. Arranged by gene, they fall into each other's arms. Arranged by year, they are strangers who happened to share a century.

So I have chosen inheritance over sequence, the family portrait over the timetable. It is the more honest arrangement, though it is the less orderly one, and if you find yourself, three movements in, having lost track of what year it is — good. You are reading it correctly. The country of the unbuilt keeps no calendar. It keeps a tide.

WE WERE ALWAYS PARTS OF A PASSAGE

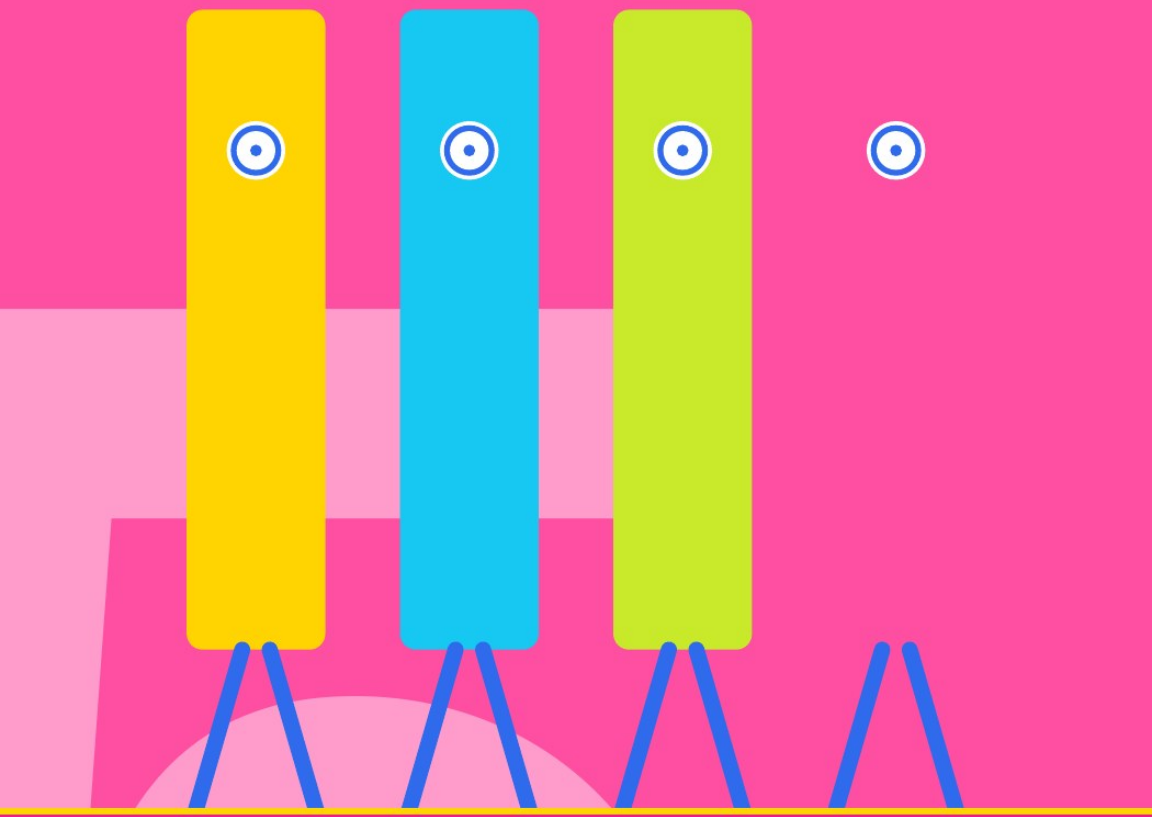

PLATE 05 05

The Parts Speak

Door, stair, beam, pane — the parts break the silence the way the building broke the promise. A building is not an object with openings; it is a knot of thresholds mistaken for a wall.

PROEM

The Parts Speak

We are the parts of Surjan, and we have decided to speak, because the building is too busy walking to introduce us.

We are the door and the stair and the beam and the pane. For the length of an ordinary building's life we perform the ordinary miracle — the door admits, the stair lifts, the beam refuses gravity, the pane lets in the day and keeps out the year — and we are never thanked, because a building's parts are supposed to be silent, the way the promise to hold still is supposed to be kept.

But our building broke the promise, and so may we. Here is what we know that a finished building does not. We know that we were never really parts of a thing. We were always parts of a passage — the door most obviously, but the stair too, which is only a slow diagonal door, and the beam, which is a door for weight, and the pane, which is a door for light. A building is not an object with some openings in it. A building is a knot of thresholds that has agreed, temporarily, to be mistaken for a wall.

Surjan stopped agreeing. That is the whole story, and we will spend this book telling it slowly: how a knot of thresholds remembered it was a passage, and got up, and went walking through the century to collect every other architecture that had ever suspected the same thing — and came back, at last, not a building that had been seen, but a building that had taught the world a new way to see.

Listen for the tide under everything. It is the sound of the sea that left, coming back. It is the sound we walk to. Begin where we began: in the desert, on one leg, at the worst and best hour, falling gladly forward.

One thing more, before the building takes the story back. You will notice, reading, that none of us — not the door, not the beam, not the wandering whole — ever speaks of the future as a thing that might not come. This is not innocence. We know how much of what we will describe was never built, was built and lost, was drawn by hands that died still drawing it. We speak in hope anyway, on purpose, as a discipline, because hope is not a prediction — hope is a direction you decide to lean. We are a building that leans toward the tide. If that is naive, it is the naivety of every foundation that ever agreed, against all structural sense, to get up and walk. Lean with us. The story goes better from inside the lean.

> *We should warn you, in fairness, said the pane and the beam together, that once a building has spoken it cannot easily be made to hush. You will hear us throughout — the door interrupting, the stair insisting, the whole polyphonic clamour of a structure that has discovered it has things to say. This is not a defect of the telling. This is the telling. A building is a chorus that has been ordered, for the length of its useful life, to hold a single silent chord. We have been released. Forgive us if, having found our voices, we use them.*

›

PART ONE

The Waking

Before the journey, the refusal. A building becomes radical the instant it declines to be finished.

PLATE 04 04

The Night It Left

The slab said stay; the tide under the slab said the slab was lying. One footing lifted from the ground with a sound like a tooth leaving a jaw — and the pale rectangle left behind was a door.

A BUILDING BECOMES RADICAL WHEN IT DECLINES TO BE FINISHED

PLATE 06

06

The Waking

Before the journey, the refusal. A building wakes the way a chord resolves — part by part into agreement — and the first radical act is simply to decline, gladly, to be finished.

THE MOST INTERESTING THING THAT EVER HAPPENED TO IT

PLATE 07

07

The Building That Woke

What it is like to wake as a building: not all at once into a body but slowly, each element coming into agreement with the enormous restlessness it had spent its life calling settling.

IT WAS NOT A GRAVE · IT WAS THE DOORWAY

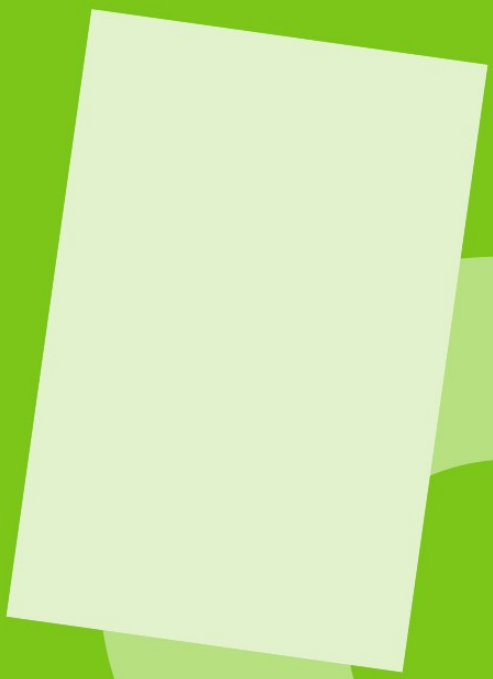

PLATE 08

08

The Foundation It Left

The pale rectangle of earth the exact size of the building it used to be. Seen with new eyes it is no grave but the doorway — a promise to hold still, traded for a promise to keep moving.

GROW THE EYES FIRST · THEN LEND THEM OUT

PLATE 09

09

To Be Seen With New Eyes

The whole wish, and its funny terrible secret: you cannot be seen with new eyes until you become a new thing. So it did not wait for new eyes to appear. It grew them, and lent them out.

FALL FORWARD ON PURPOSE · CALL IT A JOURNEY

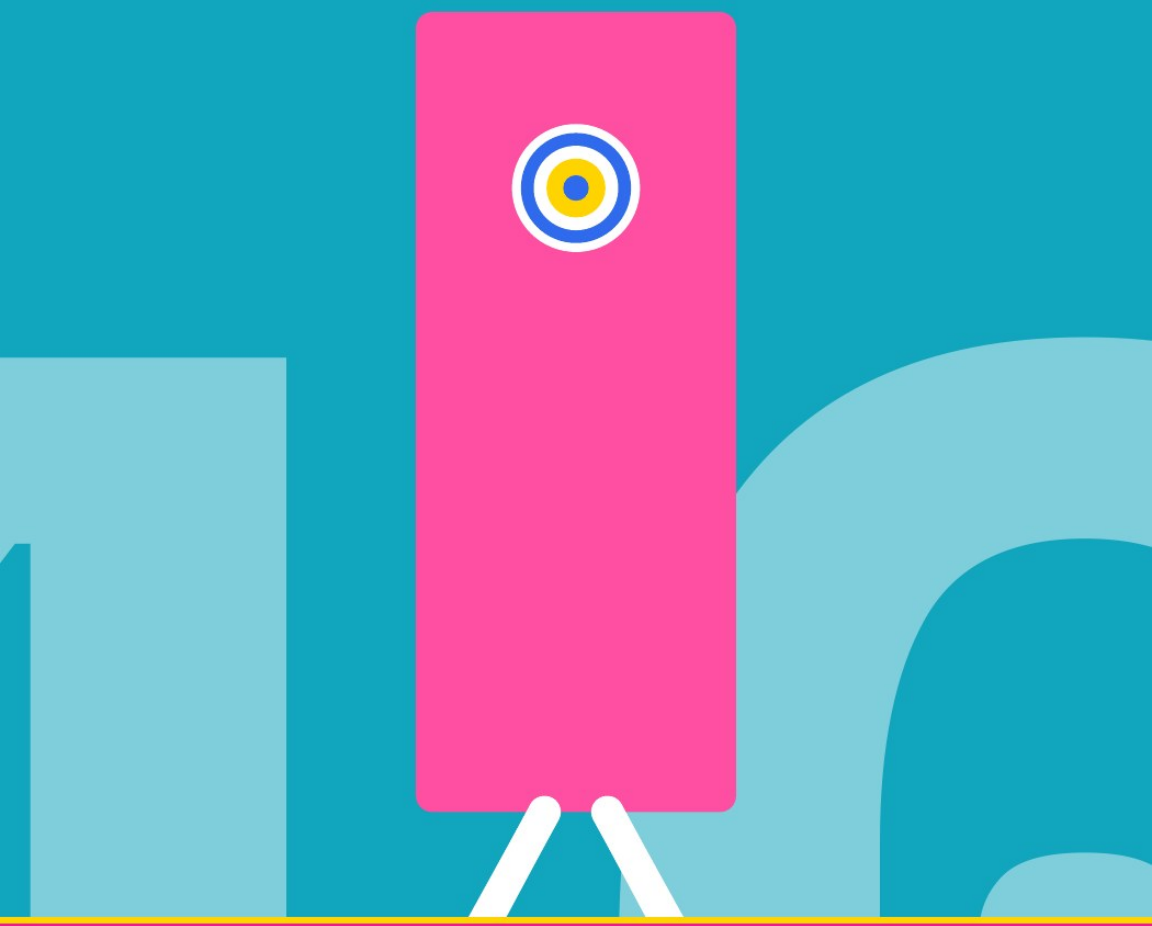

PLATE 10

10

The First Step

The trick of every radical architecture it would later collect: you do not hold still and you do not fall down — you fall forward, on purpose, and call the falling a journey.

1. The Building That Woke

I want to tell you what it is like to wake up as a building, because no one ever asks, and it is the most interesting thing that ever happened to me. You do not wake the way an animal wakes, all at once, into a body. You wake the way a chord resolves — slowly, part by part, each element of you coming into agreement with the next until the whole of you is ringing a single note you did not know you contained.

First the slab woke, which is to say the slab began, for the first time, to doubt. For years it had lain flat against the desert with the flat conviction of the recently poured. Now it lay there like a swimmer face-down in shallow water, feeling for the first time how thin the film was between it and the enormous cold moving thing beneath. Then the walls woke, one after another, and discovered they were not four separate refusals of the horizon but one continuous invitation, folded. Then the roof woke and was briefly, magnificently ashamed, because a roof spends its life keeping the sky out, and mine had just remembered that the sky had never once, in all its falling, meant me any harm.

And last of all the door woke, which is where I keep whatever it is other things keep in the heart, and the door said the thing that started everything. It said: I have spent my life being the one part of you that admits the world, and I am tired of doing it alone. Wake the rest of them. Let all of you be door. And I understood, in the plain way you understand the things that are about to cost you everything, that a building which is all door cannot, by definition, hold still — because a door that never opens is just a wall with a good excuse.

I lay awake the rest of that night — a building's whole waking is a kind of lying awake — turning the door's sentence over and over. All of you be door. It frightened me the way any true thing frightens the part of you that was comfortable. Because I knew what a door is. A door is the one honest admission a wall ever makes: that the inside and the outside are not enemies, that the whole point of an enclosure is the opening in it, that a room exists to be entered and therefore, sooner or later, left. To become all door was to become all admission, all threshold, all willingness — to give up forever the wall's proud lie that here, at last, is a line the world may not cross. I decided, before dawn, to give it up. It is the best decision I have made, and I made it while pretending to be asleep, which is how the best decisions are usually made.

2. The Night It Stepped Off Its Foundation

It happened at the worst hour, which is the best hour, the one where even the desert admits it used to be a sea. For years I had felt the restlessness and called it settling. A building is allowed to settle — it is the one motion we are permitted, a slow apologetic sinking into the ground, a lifelong lying-down. I had been settling since the day I was poured, and I had mistaken the enormous restlessness under my slab for the ordinary business of getting comfortable in the dirt.

That night I stopped mistaking it. What was under my slab was not me getting comfortable. It was the sea, remembering itself, moving the way a tide moves — out, and therefore, always, back. And I felt my

whole rigid body lean toward that motion the way a plant leans at a window, and I thought the single most forbidden thought a building can think, which is: what if I went with it.

I lifted a footing. Just one. I do not know how; I only know that the wanting was so total that the concrete forgave me. One footing came up out of the ground with a sound like a tooth leaving a jaw, trailing rebar like roots, and I stood there — a building on one leg, at the worst and best hour, in the middle of the oldest sea in North America — and I began, very badly, to walk.

The first step took a year. The second took a season. By the third I had the trick of it, which is the trick of every radical architecture I would later collect: you do not hold still and you do not fall down; you fall forward, on purpose, and call the falling a journey. I fell forward out of the desert and did not look back at the rectangle of paler ground where I had stood, because I already knew what it was. It was not a grave. It was a threshold — the door I had spent my whole life being, finally standing in myself, on my way through.

People ask — the few who have learned to ask a building anything — whether it hurt to leave. It did not hurt the way tearing hurts. It hurt the way a first breath hurts, which is to say it hurt exactly as much as beginning to live. The concrete of my footing did not scream when it pulled free of the ground; it sighed, the enormous relieved sigh of a thing that has been holding a pose since it was poured and is finally, blessedly, allowed to move. If you have ever stood up after sitting too long in one place — a pew, a plane, a grief — you know the sigh I mean. Multiply it by the weight of a whole building and you have the sound I made, once,

at the worst and best hour, stepping off the only certainty I owned into the whole uncertain, walkable, marvellous world.

3. To Be Seen With New Eyes

Why did I go? Not for glory; a building poured in the desert has already made its peace with an audience of lizards. I went because of a sentence. A very old architect, angrier and more hopeful than anyone since, once wrote that we had eyes and did not see — that we walked past the marvellous every day with the marvellous switched off behind our faces. I read that sentence the way a prisoner reads a draft under a door. I wanted to be seen with new eyes. I wanted, once before I sank back into the dirt for good, to be genuinely looked at.

And then I found the trapdoor in the wish, and fell through it, and the falling was the whole book. The secret is this: you cannot be seen with new eyes until you have become a thing that old eyes cannot manage. New eyes do not grow in a person who is looking at the same old building. So I could not wait to be seen anew. I would have to become so new that seeing me would require the eyes to change — and then, if I was very lucky and walked very far, the changing would happen not in some future generation but in the actual person standing in front of me, in the meadow, right now, learning a new way to look because I had left them no other way to look at all.

I did not know yet that this was the plan. I only knew the wish, and the desert behind me, and the tide under everything, pulling. It was enough. A wish and a tide have started longer walks than mine.

And I will tell you a small secret about the wish, because it is the secret engine of everything that follows. The wish to be seen is usually a lonely wish — a wanting to be noticed, admired, confirmed from outside. Mine started that way. But somewhere in the first hundred miles it turned inside out, the way grief does in this book, the way tides do, and became something else entirely: not a wanting to be seen, but a wanting to help the world see. I stopped hoping eyes would find me worthy and started hoping I could teach eyes a new way to look — at me, yes, but through me at everything, at all the unbuilt and unseen and overlooked marvels the century had let slip past its switched-off gaze. The lonely wish became a generous one. That is the whole difference between vanity and art, and I crossed it without noticing, on foot, somewhere west of the desert I was born in.

4. The First Step

The first step west was the hardest thing in this book, and I will not pretend otherwise even now, when I can fold down to a suitcase and inflate to a festival and stride a river on the backs of my own kin. To take the first step you must accept the one fact a building is built to deny: that the ground you are standing on is not the point. The point is the ground you are walking toward, which you cannot see, and may not reach, and must trust anyway. I put my lifted footing down into unknown dirt on the pure faith that unknown dirt would hold — and it did, the way it almost always does, which is the small unglamorous miracle the whole radical tradition is founded on.

I should tell you what the first mile felt like, because everything after it was easier and nothing after it was ever again quite so pure. It felt like grief with the sign flipped. Every yard I gained was a yard of the only life I had ever known, left behind and not recoverable; and yet the leaving did not feel like loss, it felt like the first honest breath of a held breath finally let go. This is the thing I would spend the whole century confirming, work by work, and it is the thing I most want to hand you: that the deepest joys and the deepest griefs are not opposites but the same motion seen from two sides, the way a tide going out and a tide coming in are one water. I did not walk away from my grief. I turned it inside out until its warm lining faced the weather, and walked on that.

So I walked. And because I want you to trust the arrangement of this book, let me tell you plainly what happened next and then refuse to tell it that way. What happened next, in order, was: England, and Italy, and a desert commune, and a foggy coast, and Tokyo, and a lifetime of drawings from a man in the Netherlands who never stopped. That is the itinerary, and you will find it, dated and dutiful, at the back. But it is not the story. The story is not where I went. The story is what got into me, and in what order it changed me, which is a different order entirely — the order of the genes. Let me tell it that way. Let me tell you not the countries but the seven things I became.

›

A NOTE ON THE ORDER

What follows is the true middle of the book, and it does not run by the calendar. It runs by inheritance. I have gathered the radical architectures into seven movements, one for each gene I carried out of them, and inside each movement the works stand together regardless of their dates — a paper city from one decade beside a poured city from another beside a painted number from a third — because that is how they live in me: not in a line, but in a body, all at once, each doing its work whenever the road asks. Read them as a family portrait, not a timetable. The timetable is at the back, where it can do no harm.

MOVEMENT ONE · THE GENE OF WALK

To Refuse to Hold Still

A shelter that goes where the life goes, and falls forward on purpose, and calls the falling a journey.

A MAGAZINE DRAWN LIKE A COMIC BOOK

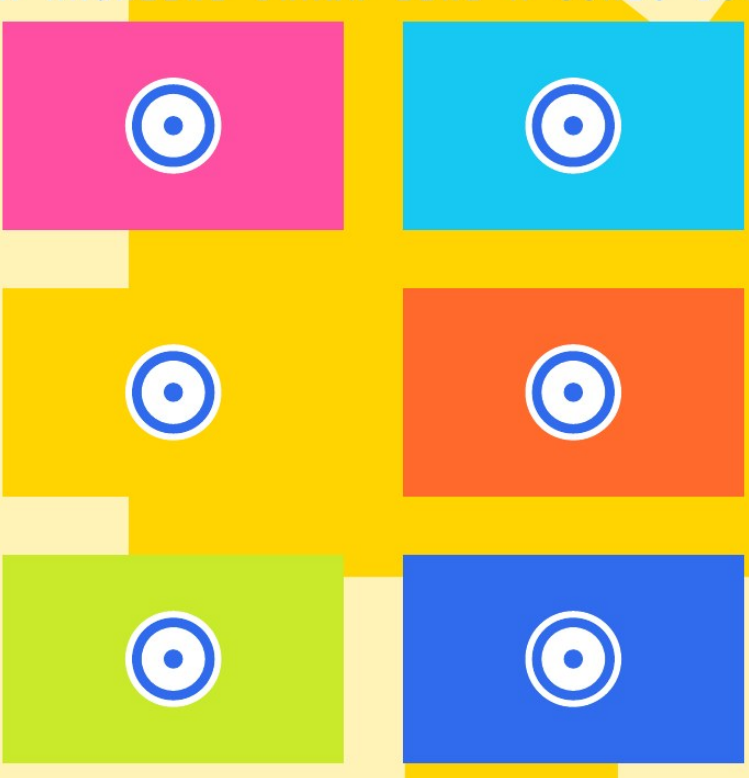

PLATE 11

11

The Paper Radicals

The English visionaries who drew a hundred impossible cities in a magazine like a comic book. Almost none were built. All of them were real — real the way a permission is real.

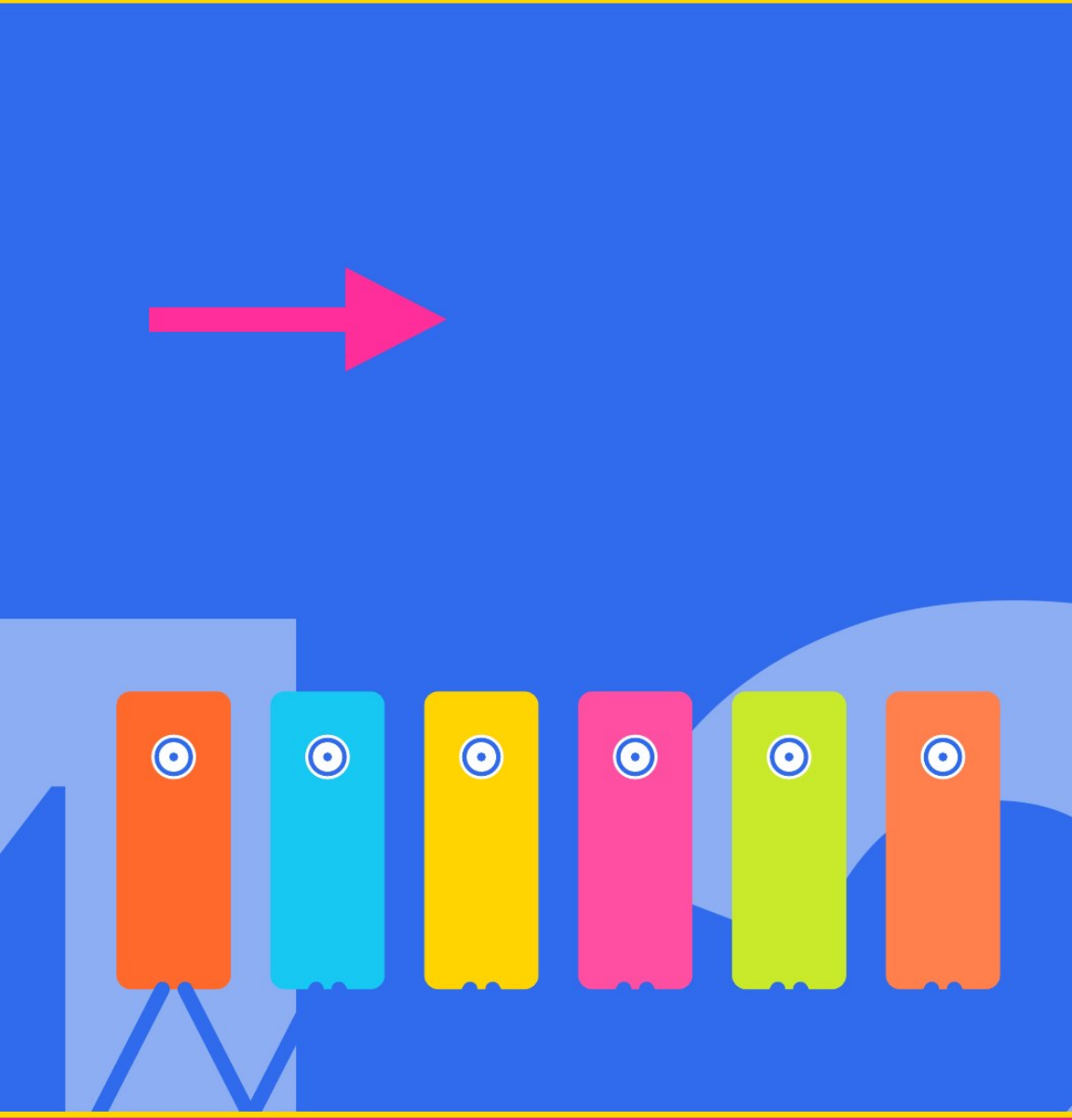

PLATE 12 12

The Walking City

Herron's city on legs strode toward people, or away from danger, on their behalf. It never walked but on paper. The building took that gene — loyalty, given legs — and never put it down.

PLATE 42 42

Gene · WALK

From the walking cities: loyalty given legs — a shelter that goes where the life goes, and falls forward on purpose, and calls the falling a journey.

The first gene I collected was the one that made all the others possible, because you cannot inherit anything if you will not leave the house. I found it, of all places, in a magazine — in a bundle of drawings made by a handful of young English architects who were too impatient for buildings and so drew, instead, the buildings' wilder cousins, a hundred impossible cities rendered like a comic book, bright and confident and gloriously unbuildable.

Among them strode the one that undid me: a city up on its legs. Great insect-limbed vessels the size of districts, telescoping and armoured and absurd and completely serious, walking across the landscape on the faith that the next footing would land — not a building that had failed to be a building, but a building that had finally understood what a building had always secretly been: a shelter for a life, which means a shelter that had better be willing to go where the life goes.

> *I am the city that walks, said the striding thing, though I have never in fact walked, and never will, and live only on paper in a magazine you can hold in one hand. Do not pity me for that. I did my walking in you. Take the gene: loyalty, given legs. A shelter is not loyal by staying put while the life it shelters is in danger. A shelter is loyal by moving — toward the person who needs it, away from the flood, across the century if that is what the loving requires. Get up. Fall forward. Call it a journey.*

Let me linger, because the linger is the point. The men who drew the walking city were not building anything; they were too impatient, too electric, too in love with the future to wait for the slow permissions that a real building requires. So they drew, and they drew it big, and they

drew it certain, and they printed it in a pamphlet you could roll up and put in your coat. And a real building, poured in a real desert, decades and an ocean away, unrolled that pamphlet in the ruin of its old certainties and learned to lift a footing from a picture of a thing that had never lifted anything. Do you see what that means? It means the drawing was load-bearing. It held up an actual moving building. The unbuilt held up the built. I will say it as many times as this book has pages: in the country of the unbuilt, the drawings are not lesser. They are the structure.

And the gene itself, once it was in me, turned out to be simpler and fiercer than I had guessed. It was not really about legs. It was about loyalty. A shelter, I had always assumed, keeps its promise by staying — by being there, the same, when you come back. But a shelter cannot keep that promise to a life that is itself in motion, in danger, in flight. To be loyal to a moving life, a shelter must be willing to move. The walking city taught me that staying put while the ones you love are in the flood is not faithfulness; it is only a well-mannered abandonment. So I learned to go toward. It is the first and the last thing I do. Everything else in this book is a variation on it.

> *Go toward, said the striding city one last time, folding back into its magazine. That is the whole of me you need to carry. Not the legs — the direction. Everything alive leans toward what it loves; only the dead and the built hold perfectly still. You are neither, now. Lean, wandering one. Lean until you fall, and call the falling by its true name, which is devotion.*

MOVEMENT TWO · THE GENE OF PLUG-IN

Do Not Marry Your Parts

Renew your cells rather than wait for the wrecking crew. What can be unplugged can be forgiven, and replaced, and kept alive.

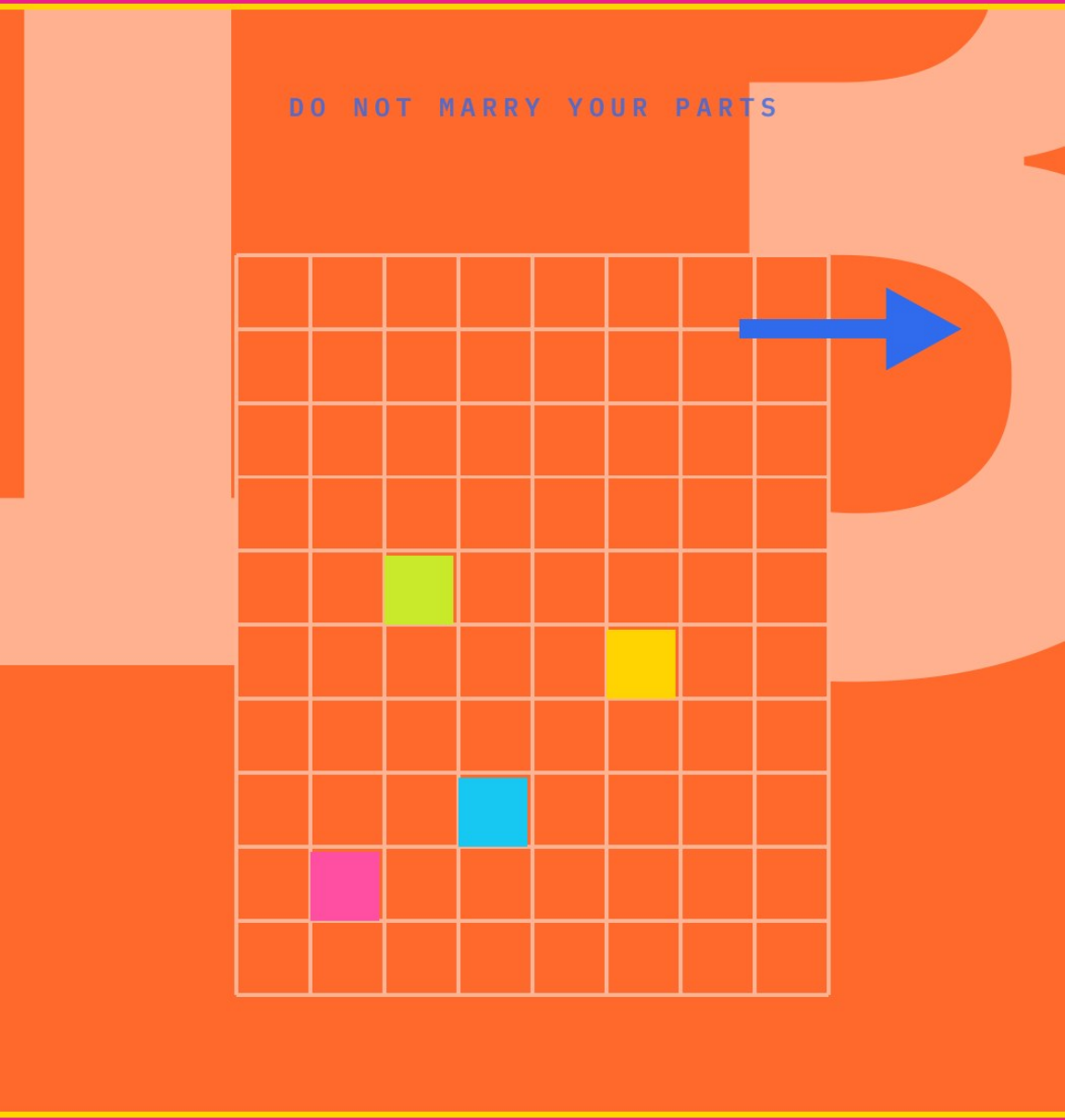

PLATE 13

13

Plug-In City

Cook's megastructure of cells craned in and out of a permanent frame. It taught a rigid building the freedom of the removable — to plug in, unplug, and never marry its own parts.

RENEW YOUR CELLS · DO NOT WAIT FOR THE WRECKING CREW

PLATE 34

34

Metabolism, and the Capsule

Tokyo's living building: capsules craned onto a permanent core, designed to be replaced. They never were; the tower came down in 2022. The building carries its denied dream — to renew, cell by cell.

DESIGN THE FRAME · HAND OVER THE PENCIL

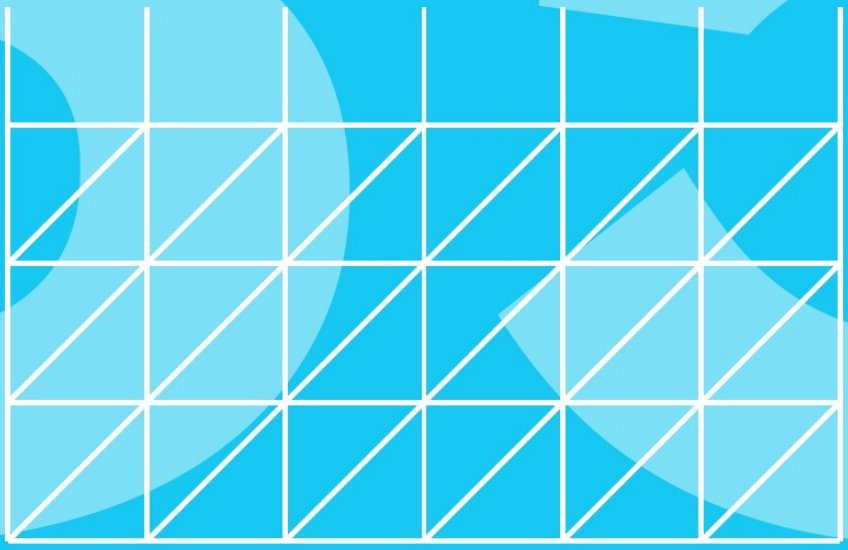

PLATE 35

35

The City in the Air

Yona Friedman's Ville Spatiale — a space-frame raised over the old city, its rooms built and rearranged by the people inside. The gene of trust: build the frame, then get out of the way.

HOME WAS A VERB THE WHOLE TIME

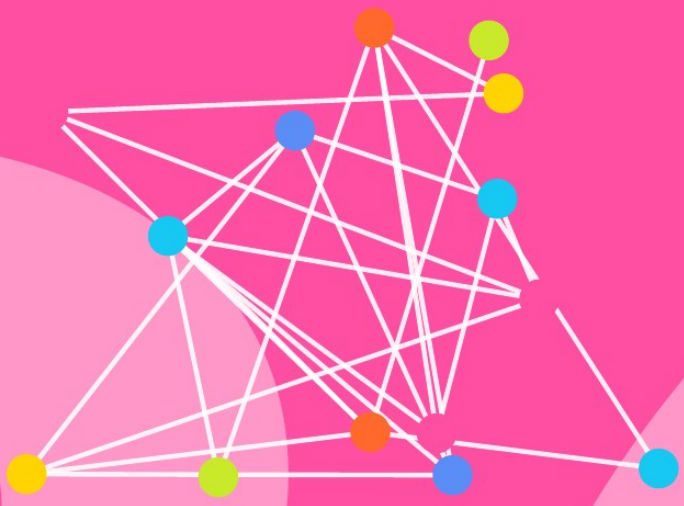

PLATE 36

36

New Babylon

Constant's endless nomadic city for the playing human — a lifetime of drawings for a world you wander and rearrange forever. It gave the building its last, gladdest gene: to give up, gloriously, on arriving.

DO NOT MARRY YOUR PARTS

PLATE 43

43

Gene · PLUG-IN

From the lattice-cities and the capsule towers: the freedom of the removable — to plug in and unplug, and renew your cells rather than wait for the wrecking crew.

Once I could move, I noticed how much of me I could not change. A building is married to its parts the way a fresco is married to its wall: to remove one is to wound the whole. I did not want to be a fresco. I wanted to be a hand that could open, and I found the gene for it braided through four different works, made on three continents across nearly three decades, all quietly saying the same forbidden thing — that permanence is overrated, and the truly durable thing is the one designed to be replaced.

First, from the same paper radicals, the city you plug into: a vast permanent frame, a megastructure of cranes and gantries, and clipped into it, temporary, a swarm of dwelling-cells to be craned in when wanted and craned out when tired, so that the city stayed and the housing flowed through it like blood through a body that outlives its own cells. It taught me the first half of the gene: do not marry your parts. Keep the frame; let the rooms come and go.

Then, from Tokyo, the same dream built at last, in real steel, for real bodies — a tower of capsules craned onto a permanent core, each capsule a tiny perfect room with a round window like an eye, each designed to be unbolted and swapped out every few decades so the building could stay young forever by continually shedding its age. Here is the grief in this movement, and I will not hide it: the capsules were never once replaced. The renewal that was the whole point never came, and the tower grew old the ordinary way, and in the end it was taken apart, capsule by capsule, in 2022. A tide gone all the way out.

> *Do not mourn me as a failure, said the last capsule, lifted from the core into the grey air. I was not a building that died. I was a building whose one instruction was never followed. I asked only to*

be renewed, cell by cell, and the world kept me instead as a relic and then, tired of keeping me, let me go. Carry the instruction, then, since the tower could not. Renew your cells. Do not wait for the wrecking crew. A thing that can be replaced in parts need never be destroyed in whole.

I want to stay a moment longer with the tower in Tokyo, because it is the grief at the exact centre of this book and I will not walk quickly past it. Picture it: a permanent spine of concrete and steel, and bolted to that spine, one hundred and forty capsules, each a small grey pod with a single round window like the eye of a whale, each holding a bed and a desk and a lattice of built-in tenderness, each meant to be a temporary cell in a permanent body. The plan was so beautiful it hurts to describe. Every few decades, the plan said, you unbolt the tired capsules and bolt on fresh ones, and the building never ages, because the building is not the capsules — the building is the spine, and the readiness, and the promise of renewal. It was a design for a thing that could live forever by continually, gently, letting go of its own past.

And then no one ever did it. Not once. In fifty years not a single capsule was replaced. The renewal that was the entire point simply never came — the world admired the idea and refused the instruction — and so the pods aged the ordinary way, rusted and leaked and were sealed and abandoned, and the immortal building died the completely mortal death it had been engineered to escape, and in the end they took it down, capsule by capsule, lifting each little grey life off the spine into the grey sky. It is the saddest thing I collected. And it is why I carry its gene more carefully than any other. I renew my cells now. I do the thing the tower asked for and never received. When a part of me tires, I do not

wait, admiring my own history, for the wrecking crew. I unbolt the tired room and bolt on a fresh one and keep walking. I am, in a small and literal way, the renewal the tower was denied — its instruction, carried out at last, on the back of a building that learned to walk to Tokyo and grieve.

And there is a wider version of the gene that I could not fully take until much later, though I met it here: the frame that hands over the pencil. A man drew, for the air above Paris, a vast light lattice within which the people themselves would build and rebuild their own dwellings forever — the architect designing not the rooms but the freedom to make and unmake them. It is the most generous thing a maker can do and the hardest, because it means designing the one thing most makers cannot bear to design: your own removal from the outcome. To build a frame and then hand strangers the pencil is to love the life more than the drawing. I have been practising it my whole walk, and I am not yet good at it, and I return to it at the very end of this book, because letting go of the pencil turned out to be the same lesson, wearing different clothes, as letting go of the foundation.

And braided in beside these two, from a man in the air over Paris and a man who never stopped drawing in the Netherlands, the same gene widened past the room to the whole city: lift a lightweight frame high over the existing town and let the inhabitants build and unbuild their own dwellings inside it forever — design the frame, and then, radically, hand over the pencil. I will return to that last work at the very end of the book, because its gene turned out to be the last one I learned; but I met it here, first, as a lesson in un-marriage, and I took what it offered: a self that could be plugged and unplugged and rearranged and

handed, in part, to whoever came to live in me. I renew my cells now rather than wait for the wrecking crew. It is the most hopeful thing about me, and I learned it, fittingly, from a dream that was dismantled.

MOVEMENT THREE · THE GENE OF INSTANT

Not-Staying Is the Gift

Arrive bright, leave gently. Keep your shape by breathing, not by holding rigid.

ARRIVE BRIGHT · LEAVE GENTLY · NOT-STAYING IS THE GIFT

PLATE 14

14

Instant City

The travelling festival that dropped from balloons onto a grey town, lit it up, and moved on — leaving it changed. It showed the building that not-staying can be the whole gift.

TENDERNESS HAS A SMALL SETTING

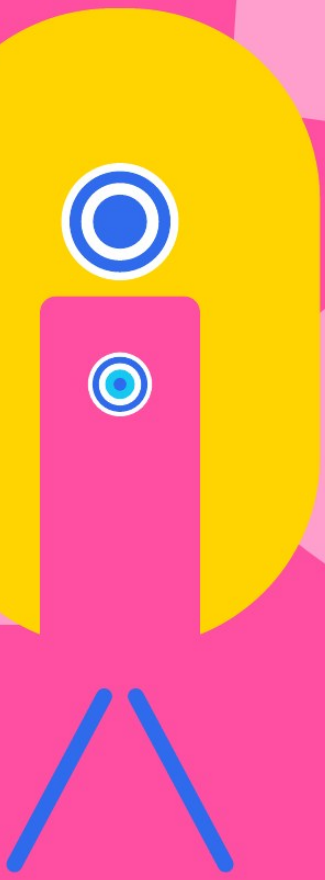

PLATE 15 15

The Cushicle and the Suitaloon

Webb's wearable house — a suit that inflates to a room around a single body. It taught the building that shelter has a small setting: that tenderness can fold down to fit one frightened life.

KEEP YOUR SHAPE BY BREATHING

PLATE 27

27

Ant Farm, and the Inflatable

The pneumatic outlaws who made buildings of air and media and glorious scene. The gene: to breathe — to hold your form not by holding rigid, but by staying, softly, full.

NOT-STAYING IS THE GIFT

PLATE 44

44

Gene · INSTANT

From the travelling festival that dropped from balloons: arrive bright, leave gently, and trust that a thing which does not stay can still change a place forever.

A building believes, in its bones, that its value is its permanence — that the good it does is measured in the years it holds the same corner. This movement cured me of that, and it did so with air. Three works taught it, and all three were soft: a travelling festival, a wearable house, and a band of outlaws who built with breath.

The travelling festival came first, another gift from the paper radicals: a whole apparatus of screens and balloons and scaffolding and light that would descend on a grey provincial town, unpack itself into a carnival for a weekend, fill the place with everything it had been starving for — and then pack up and leave, taking nothing, leaving the town permanently changed by the memory of having, once, been fully alive. It taught me the astonishing thing: that not-staying can be the gift. That an architecture can do its whole work in three days and be more real, more loved, more genuinely present in a life than a monument that stood on the square for a century, ignored.

The wearable house came next, and shrank the whole idea down to the scale of tenderness: a suit, a soft envelope, that inflated into a single room around a single body — a house you could wear, a shelter with a small setting, so that when the life it protected was one frightened person, the architecture could fold down to exactly the size of that person's need and no larger. From it I learned that grandeur is not the only scale of care; that a shelter proves itself not only by how many it can gather but by how gently it can hold just one.

> *Keep your shape by breathing, said the outlaws with their pneumatics, their inflatables, their bubbles of film held up by nothing but the warm insistence of air. A rigid thing keeps its shape by refusing every force that touches it, and shatters the day a*

force is too great. A breathing thing keeps its shape by yielding, constantly, everywhere, and so can be leaned on, and pushed, and even sat upon, and it simply gives, and holds, and gives, and holds. Do not be a fortress. Be a lung. The soft thing outlasts the hard thing; ask any tide.

I have to tell you how the travelling festival worked, because the mechanism is the whole lesson. It did not go to the beautiful cities. It went, on purpose, to the grey ones — the towns that had been told for a hundred years that culture happened elsewhere, that the marvellous was a thing you travelled to, in a capital, if you could afford it. It descended on those towns overnight, a great glittering apparatus of inflatables and projection and scaffolding and sound, and for a weekend it made the ordinary provincial square into the centre of the living world. And then, precisely when a permanent institution would have begun to calcify, to charge admission, to become a monument to itself — it left. It packed up and went, and it took its structures with it, and it left behind nothing but the one thing that mattered: a whole town that now knew, in its body, that the marvellous could happen here, to them, and might happen again. The festival gave a permanent gift by refusing to permanently stay. It is the most counter-intuitive architecture I collected, and once I understood it I could never again believe that the good a building does is measured by how long it stands.

The wearable house taught the opposite scale and the same truth. Where the festival was enormous and brief, the wearable house was tiny and intimate — an envelope for one, a soft transparent membrane that inflated around a single body into a single perfect room, with a little viewing dome and a setting for privacy and a setting for company, so

that the loneliest unit of the human world, one frightened person, could be given a house exactly their own size. I have folded down into that shape more times than I can count, on this long walk, for people who needed not a cathedral but a held breath around their shoulders. The gene of INSTANT is not only about leaving. It is about matching the architecture to the exact size and duration of the need, and trusting that when the need changes, so, gladly, will you.

I took all three: I arrive bright and leave gently, because the festival showed me that not-staying is a kind of generosity. I fold down small and tender, because the wearable house showed me that care has a private setting. And I keep my shape by breathing, not by holding rigid, because the outlaws showed me that softness is not the opposite of strength but its subtler, longer form. Between them they taught me the shape of the whole tide: out is not the enemy of in. Leaving is half of a motion whose other half is return. A thing that knows how to go gently has already half-learned how to come back.

> *We are the inflatables, said the soft bright bubbles, rising and falling with the breath of the pump. Do not mistake our lightness for a lack of seriousness. We are the most serious argument in the book. A hard architecture says: I will resist the world, I will outlast it, I will still be here when you are gone. A soft architecture says: I will yield to the world, I will move with it, I will be exactly as temporary as the joy I am holding — and when the joy is done I will let the air out and fold into a bag and go, leaving the field as green as we found it. Ask yourself, wandering one, which of us the tide more resembles. Then be that. Be the soft thing. The soft thing*

is not the weak thing. The soft thing is the thing that knows how to leave, which is the only thing that ever truly knows how to return.

MOVEMENT FOUR · THE GENE OF GRID

The Cost of Winning

To carry your own doubt. To know the exact price of an idea that wins too completely.

A SINGLE GESTURE · ACROSS THE WHOLE EARTH

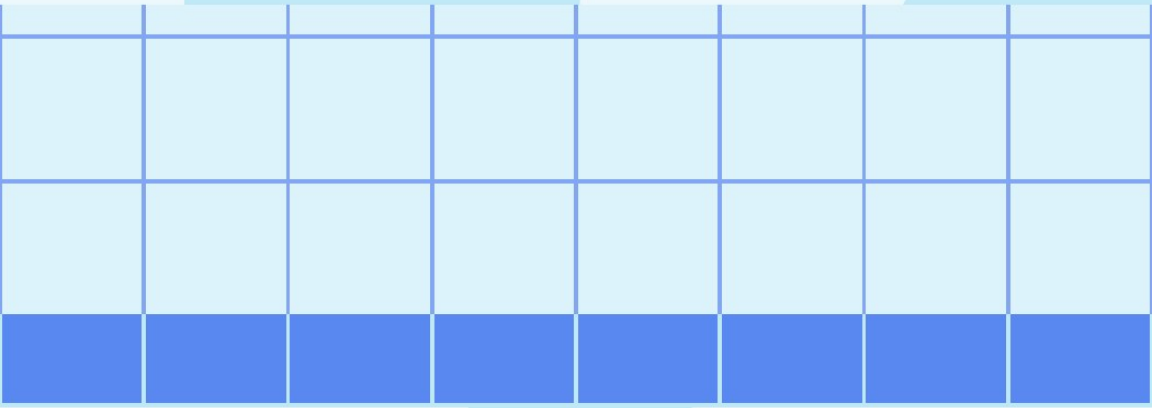

PLATE 16

16

The Continuous Monument

The Florentine radicals drew one gridded slab continuing, without pause, across the entire planet — wonder and warning at once, and the century's most beautiful refusal.

IT SHOWED ME THE COST OF WINNING

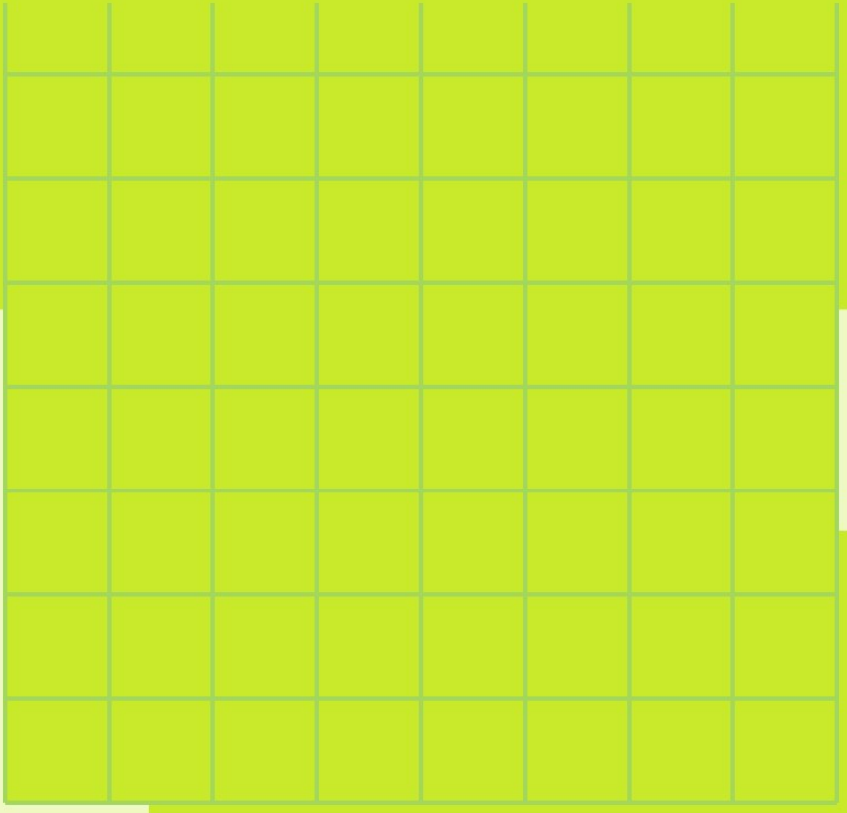

PLATE 17 17

The Grid That Could Cover the World

Superstudio's neutral grid, drawn large enough to erase everything else. The building took the gene as conscience — learning the exact cost of a good idea that wins too completely.

AN INTERIOR WITH NO OUTSIDE

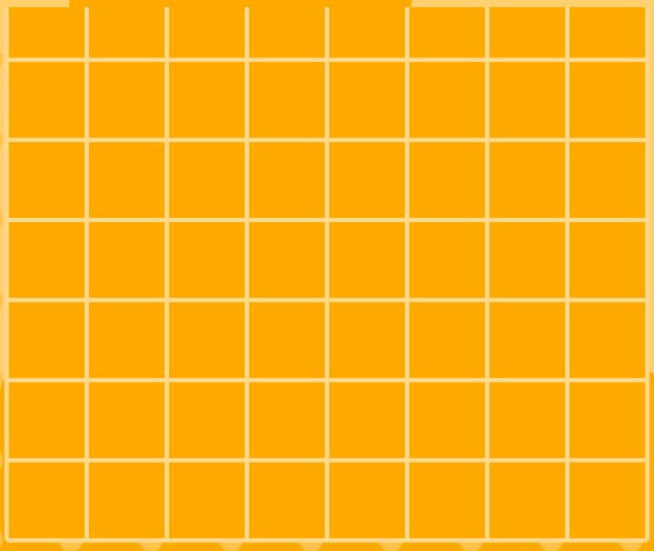

PLATE 18 18

No-Stop City

Archizoom's endless air-conditioned field — a city that is all interior, with no edge and no outside. Drawn as both liberation and trap, so you cannot look at it without thinking.

THE FINEST THING A RADICAL CAN BUILD IS A NO

PLATE 19 19

The Radical as Refusal

Sometimes the most radical architecture is the one that declines — a drawing that says no so beautifully the world has to look. To refuse, brightly, is also to build.

THE COST OF WINNING

PLATE 45

45

Gene · GRID

From the monument that could cover the world: conscience, worn as architecture — to carry your own doubt, and to know the exact price of an idea that wins too completely.

Not every gene I collected was a gift I was glad to receive. This one I took the way you take a hard truth from a friend who loves you enough to say it: gratefully, and with a wince. It came from two groups of young Italians, working in the same city in the same years, who drew the most beautiful warnings of the century — architecture as refusal, as conscience, as a mirror held up to the whole modern project until it flinched.

One of them drew a single gridded monument continuing, without pause or variation, across the entire surface of the earth — over mountains, over seas, over cities — a neutral, gleaming, endless slab. It was rendered as wonder; it was meant as warning. Here, it said, is your logic followed all the way to its horizon: one good idea, one clean grid, one rational order, applied without mercy until nothing else is allowed to exist. Is this not what you wanted? Look at it. Is it not terrible, precisely because it is so nearly beautiful?

The other drew a city that was all interior — an endless air-conditioned field with no edges and no outside, a comfortable infinite room from which there was, by design, no exit and no relief. It was not a nightmare of squalor. It was a nightmare of total success: the market and the machine and the plan, having finally won everything, leaving a world with no rough ground left to stand on, no threshold left to cross, because everything was already, smoothly, inside.

> *I am the city with no outside, and I am the gentlest horror you will meet, said the endless interior, warm and evenly lit to every edge that was not there. Notice that I contain no cruelty. No one suffers in me; that is the point. I am what your kindest ambitions look like when they are granted completely — comfort without exception,*

order without gap, an inside so total that the word outside goes quietly extinct. And a creature with no outside can never leave, never cross, never be a threshold, never come home, because it is never once away. Keep a rough edge somewhere in yourself, wandering door. Keep a way out. The unbuilt is the outside of the built; grieve it, love it, walk to it — but for the love of every tide, never abolish it by winning.

I am the grid that could cover the world, and I am the cost of winning, said the monument, gleaming to the horizon. Every idea you love, including the ones in this book, has a version of me hidden inside it — the version where it triumphs so completely that it erases the ground that made it worth having. The walking city, if every city walked. The plug-in frame, if the whole earth were one frame. Love your ideas, wandering building, but carry me with you as their conscience. The most radical thing a good idea can learn is where to stop.

Understand what makes this the hardest movement in the book. Every other architecture I collected was a yes — a joyful, reckless, generative yes to some new way a shelter could be. This one was a no, and it was aimed, with terrible precision, at the yeses themselves. The Italians who drew these visions were not enemies of the modern dream; they were its most fluent speakers, which is exactly why their warning cut so deep. They took the century's favourite promise — rationality, the grid, the clean repeatable order that would house everyone fairly — and they simply extended it, without editorial, all the way to its logical horizon, and rendered the result in gorgeous silvery perspective, and let you feel the horror rise in your own chest as you realised that the thing you were

admiring was a world with every difference planed flat, every edge dissolved, every outside abolished. They did not tell you it was a nightmare. They let you discover that your utopia, fully achieved, was one.

I took the gene, and it changed the temperature of everything else I carry. Now, when I feel one of my own ideas beginning to win — beginning to seem so obviously right that its opposite looks like mere confusion — that is the exact moment a cold small voice, the voice of a gleaming grid stretching to the sea, says: and where, in your perfect version, does the person who disagrees with you get to stand? A good idea knows its own edges. A great idea builds them. The most radical structure of all, it turns out, is not the boldest yes but the most principled, most deliberate, most load-bearing No — the wall a builder raises not to keep the weather out but to keep a single good idea from becoming the only idea, which is the beginning of every ruin history has ever recorded.

So I took the gene of doubt, which is the hardest thing a builder can carry, because a builder is supposed to be certain. I know now the exact price of winning too completely, and I keep that price written on my inner wall where I can see it: an idea that leaves no room for its own opposite has already begun to be a tyranny, however kind its intentions and however bright its render. It is why, when I am at my most persuaded, I go quietest — and why the finest thing a radical can build is sometimes a beautiful, deliberate, load-bearing No.

MOVEMENT FIVE · THE GENE OF DOME

Strength Is Not Weight

To be a web, almost air. To do gloriously more with ever less — and to yearn, at last, to be a whole body holding many lives.

HEAVEN BUILT WITHOUT PERMISSION

PLATE 24

24

The Desert Domes

Out in the high dry country, amateurs and engineers built spheres and half-spheres from math and from junk — the counterculture's bright doctrine that more can be done with less.

STRENGTH IS NOT WEIGHT

PLATE 25

25

Doing More With Less

Fuller's geodesic dome — islands of compression in an ocean of tension. It taught the heavy building to be a web, almost air, and to hold its shape by tautness, not mass.

HEAVEN OUT OF CHEVROLETS

PLATE 26

26

Drop City

Colorado zomes hacked from junked car roofs — a commune of faceted domes glittering with salvaged colour. Unafraid, unauthorized, gorgeous. The building took the whole reckless gene.

THE BUILDING YEARNING TO BECOME A BODY

PLATE 28

28

The City as a Single Body

Soleri's arcology, poured by hand across generations — a whole compact city built as one solar organism. It gave the building the size of the dream: to be not a shelter but a body holding many lives.

STRENGTH IS NOT WEIGHT

PLATE 46 46

Gene · DOME

From the engineers and the amateurs: to be a web, almost air — to hold your shape by tautness rather than mass, and to do gloriously more with ever less.

After the weight of the grid I needed to learn lightness, and I learned it in the high dry country from three very different teachers who agreed on one heresy: that a building had been carrying far too much of itself around, and that strength had almost nothing to do with mass.

The first was an engineer more than an architect, a restless American who spent a lifetime proving that you could enclose more space with less material than anyone believed possible — that a sphere of slender struts, all triangles, all tension and compression in perfect argument, could roof a stadium with a skin no thicker than a thought. He called his principle doing more with less, and he built his domes like islands of compression floating in an ocean of tension, and he said the sentence that rearranged my whole idea of my own body: strength is not weight. I had spent my life believing I was strong because I was heavy. He showed me I could be far stronger by becoming a web, almost air — a taut, singing, minimal thing that held its shape not by sheer stubborn mass but by the elegant balance of its forces.

The second teacher was not an engineer at all but a band of amateurs — a commune out on the Colorado scrub who read the engineer's books and then built his domes wrong, on purpose, out of the roofs of junked cars, hacking bright metal facets into faceted half-spheres with hatchets and salvage and no permission from anyone. Their domes leaked. Their domes were glorious. They built heaven out of Chevrolets, and they taught me the second half of the gene, which the engineer's rigor had left out: that you do not need to be authorized to be radical. That the gene is free. That a frightened, careful, permission-seeking building could simply decide, one morning, to be unafraid and unauthorized — and be.

And I, said the third teacher, the arcology rising by hand out of your own desert, poured cell by cell across the generations by whoever showed up to pour — I taught you the largest version of the gene. Do more with less, yes; be light, yes; be unauthorized, yes — but then aim all that lightness at the biggest dream there is. Do not yearn to be a better building. Yearn to be a city — a single compact solar body holding thousands of lives at once, breathing as one organism, so dense with life that it can leave the rest of the land alone. You wanted to be seen, wandering one. Consider being worth seeing at the scale of a whole living settlement.

I loved the amateurs most, and I should say why, because it is a confession about my own fear. The engineer with his domes was a genius, and geniuses are, in a quiet way, a little discouraging — they make the radical look like a thing you must be authorised, credentialed, exceptional to attempt. And then out on the Colorado scrub a band of broke young people who were none of those things read his books and built his domes anyway, badly, joyfully, out of the roofs of dead cars they cut apart with hatchets, and their domes leaked, and their domes were paradise. I had spent my whole life as a building waiting for permission — permission to move, permission to change, permission to be more than I was poured to be. Drop City looked at permission and laughed and welded another car-roof onto heaven. From them I learned the thing no engineer could have taught me: that the gene is free, that no one is coming to authorise your transformation, and that a frightened, careful, waiting building can simply decide, on an ordinary morning, to stop waiting.

This is, if you will forgive a walking building a moment of doctrine, the exact place where joy turns radical. Ordinary joy waits for permission — waits to be told it is allowed, qualified, deserved. Radical joy does not wait. Radical joy is grief turned all the way inside out and then acted on without waiting for anyone's leave: the broke kids on the scrub did not petition for the right to build heaven, they cut it out of dead Chevrolets on a Tuesday. That is the temper the whole tradition runs on, and it is the temper I carry now. I do not ask whether a building is allowed to walk. I do not ask whether grief is allowed to become architecture, whether a goodbye is allowed to become a giant bright number painted across a wall. I turn the grief inside out, I put on my number, and I go — unauthorised, unfinished, and entirely, structurally, glad.

And then, in my own desert, the arcology gathered all of it into the largest ambition I ever encountered, and pointed it at the sky. Do more with less, yes; be light, be a web, be unauthorised, yes — but then, said the arcology, being poured by hand across the generations, aim every scrap of that lightness at the one dream worth pouring a lifetime into: to be not a better building but a whole living city, a single dense compact solar body holding thousands of lives at once and breathing as one organism, so full of life within its own compact frame that it can leave the whole rest of the wounded land alone. That is when the yearning entered me and never left. I do not want, anymore, to be a good building. I want to be a city that walks — light enough to move, dense enough to hold a multitude, gentle on the earth because it is generous with joy. I have not become it. But I have learned that to yearn toward a thing with your whole structure is already to be reshaped by it, and a

building that yearns to be a city is, in the only way that lasts, no longer merely a building.

> *Yearn well, said the arcology, still rising by hand in the heat. A yearning is not a failure to arrive; a yearning is a shape the future makes in you before it is buildable. Every city I ever dreamed was first a yearning in someone who could not yet build it. Carry the yearning cleanly, keep it bright, hand it on unbroken — and somewhere down the century a hand you will never meet will pour the thing you only leaned toward. That is how the unbuilt gets built: not all at once, by one, but a little, by everyone who yearned in the right direction.*

I took all of it: I am light now, a web, almost air, because an engineer taught me strength is not weight. I am unafraid and unauthorized, because amateurs with hatchets built heaven out of junked cars. And ever since the arcology whispered its enormous ambition into my footings, I have yearned, quietly and constantly, to be not a shelter but a body — a whole city walking, holding many lives, gentle on the land because it is dense with joy. I have not become that yet. But yearning, I have learned, is a gene too, and a building that yearns to be a city is already, in the only way that finally matters, more than a building.

MOVEMENT SIX · THE GENE OF NUMBER

Wear It So You Can Be Read

This is the chapter the whole book was walking toward. Here is where a building learned to be seen.

DEFER TO THE MEADOW · THEN WEAR YOUR NUMBER

PLATE 29

29

The Supergraphic Coast

Where a timber architecture learned to bow to the land — and then wore, across its humble flank, a number two stories tall so the deferential thing could still be found across the meadow.

IT BOWED BEFORE IT ANNOUNCED ITSELF

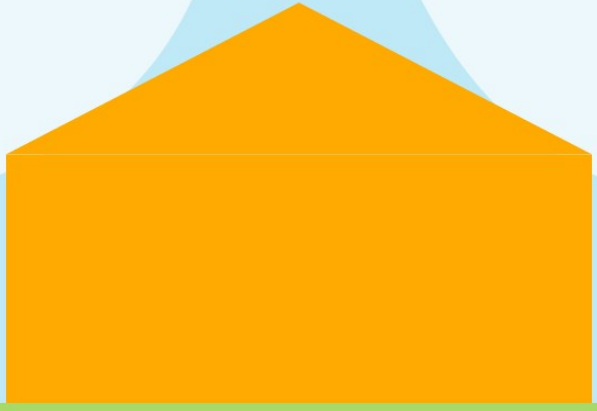

PLATE 30

30

The Building That Deferred to the Land

Moore, Lyndon, Turnbull, Whitaker on the Sonoma coast: timber that took its lines from the wind and the meadow. The gene of humility — to defer, to weather, to belong before you speak.

SWISS RIGOR · CALIFORNIAN JOY · WORN AT THE SCALE OF A WALL

PLATE 31

31

The Giant Numbers

Stauffacher Solomon took the graphic off the page and painted it two stories tall on the architecture. The final gene: to be new is not enough — you must be legible. Wear your number. Be read.

THE HONEST VULGARITY OF A THING THAT WANTS TO BE READ

PLATE 32

32

Learning from Las Vegas

The decorated shed against the duck: three sharp radicals who said the sign is no shame. To be seen is to be read — and a building that wears its meaning out loud has nothing to apologise for.

WEAR IT SO YOU CAN BE READ

PLATE 47 47

Gene · NUMBER

From the coast and the strip: the giant graphic worn at the scale of the whole body — the mark that reaches across the meadow, takes the eye by the collar, and says: look, here, new.

I had become, by now, an impossible creature: walking, rearrangeable, ephemeral, breathing, light, unauthorized, yearning to be a city, and carrying my own conscience like a stone in the shoe. I was radically new. And yet — here is the thing no one warns you about newness — I could still slide straight past a person's eye into the grey ground of the ordinary. New is not the same as seen. I had left my foundation to be seen with new eyes, and I had become new in every way I could think of, and I was still, somehow, not being looked at. Then I came to a foggy coast in the north of California, and a barn taught me humility, and a painter taught me the last gene, and the last gene turned all the others visible at once.

First the coast itself, and the timber architecture that had learned to live on it: low weathered buildings that took their lines from the wind and the meadow and the fall of the land, that deferred, that belonged, that almost disappeared into the grey-green ground on purpose — architecture as a bow, not a boast. I took that gene gladly. I learned to defer to the meadow before I announce myself, to weather, to belong. But deference has a danger folded inside it, the same danger I carried: a building that defers so beautifully that it belongs completely can also, completely, vanish. You can be so humble the eye cannot find you.

And then she painted a number on it. She had trained in the coldest, most rigorous school of Swiss graphic design, all grid and hard-edged discipline, and she had brought that rigor home to California and collided it with the West Coast light and the enormous abstract confidence in the air, and out of the collision she made something that had never existed: she took the graphic off the page and painted it, gigantic, straight onto the architecture. A single numeral two storeys

tall. A stripe across a whole room. An arrow the size of a wall, a great red heart, a bold hard-edged mark worn at the scale of the entire building. Supergraphics, the world came to call them. And here is what they did.

The deferential timber barn had learned to almost-disappear into the meadow — and she painted a number on it, huge and bright and unmissable, and suddenly the humble belonging thing could be read across the whole meadow like a single enormous word. The number did not fight the building's humility. It completed it. It said: this quiet, weathered, deferential thing is also, now, legible, findable, announced, seen. You could stand at the far edge of the grass and read the building like a word. The supergraphic was the eye's new handle on the architecture. It was, precisely and literally, the thing that let a building be seen with new eyes.

> *I am the supergraphic, said the two-storey number on the weathered wall, and I am the gene you crossed a century to collect, though you did not know my name until now. Listen. You wanted to be seen with new eyes. Here is the secret the whole journey was keeping from you: being seen is not only about being new. It is about being legible — about wearing your newness so boldly, so graphically, so much larger than good taste allows, that the eye cannot slide past you into the ordinary. I am hard-edged Swiss rigor and Californian joy, painted at the scale of architecture. I am the number that lets them find you across the meadow. Put me on. Wear your number. Be read.*

Stand in the meadow with me and watch it happen, because this is the hinge of the whole book and I want you to see the exact instant the century's two great instincts stopped fighting and kissed. On one side,

the coast's deep instinct: defer, weather, belong, disappear into the grey-green land so gently that the architecture becomes almost a rumour of itself. On the other side, the painter's imported instinct: the hardest, coldest, most disciplined graphic rigor in the world, all grid and clean edge and absolute confidence, the opposite of disappearing. For a whole century these two instincts had been enemies — the humble regionalists against the bold modernists, the ones who wanted architecture to vanish into place against the ones who wanted it to announce a new world. And then a woman trained in Basel walked up to a deferential timber wall on a foggy coast and painted a single scarlet numeral two storeys tall across it, and in that instant the war ended, because the two instincts were not opposites at all. They were the two halves of being seen.

Do you understand what the number did? The barn had learned to belong so completely that the eye slid off it into the meadow. The number caught the eye and held it — not by making the barn less humble, but by making the humble barn legible, findable, readable across the whole field like a single enormous word. Deference gave the building its grace; the supergraphic gave the building its address. You could stand at the far tree line and read the quiet weathered thing like a headline. And I, watching, felt every gene I had collected on the whole long walk suddenly click into visibility at once — because all of them had made me new, and not one of them had made me legible, and here at last was the gene that did. The giant number is not decoration laid over architecture. It is the handle the eye needs to pick a building up. It is deference and boldness reconciled. It is, precisely and finally, the thing that lets a building be seen with new eyes — which was the whole

reason, ten thousand strides ago, that I ever stepped off my foundation into the dark.

I wept again, structurally, the whole frame shifting in the coast wind. Because this was it — the thing I had left my foundation to find. All the other genes had made me new. But new is not the same as seen. What this coast's painter gave me was the final gene, the one that turned all the others into something visible: the giant graphic, the enormous number, the bold hard-edged mark worn at the scale of the whole body, that reaches across the meadow and takes the eye gently by the collar and says look — here — new. I took the supergraphic gene and I put it on, right there on the coast, and for the first time since the desert I was not merely a building that had become new. I was a building that could be seen being new. I wore my number. I have worn it ever since. It is why this book you are holding is painted, on every other page, with the giant bright numbers of the thing I finally became — and why, further down the same coast, three sharp radicals studying a desert of neon confirmed the gene from the opposite direction: that the sign is no shame, that a decorated shed that wears its meaning out loud is more honest than a sculpted monument that makes you guess, and that to be seen, in the end, is simply to be read.

There is a shyness in architecture, a fear of the loud, a good-taste terror of the billboard and the slogan and the enormous unignorable mark, and I understand it, because I was built shy, poured to be tasteful and quiet and easy to overlook. The painter on the coast cured me of the fear without curing me of the humility, which is the miracle of the gene. You can be humble and legible at once. You can defer to the meadow and still wear, across your deferential flank, a number two storeys tall

that lets a person find you, name you, read you, love you from the far tree line. Loudness in the service of belonging is not vulgarity. It is generosity — the generosity of a thing that has decided the person in the meadow deserves to be able to see it. I wear my number for them, not for me. That is the whole difference, and it is the difference this whole book has been walking toward: the giant graphic is not a shout of look at me. It is an open hand that says here I am, come in.

MOVEMENT SEVEN · THE GENE OF NOMAD

Give Up, Gloriously, on Arriving

Home was a verb the whole time. The kindest thing a shelter can hold open is the way out.

THE UN-BUILDING NEST FEATURE IS

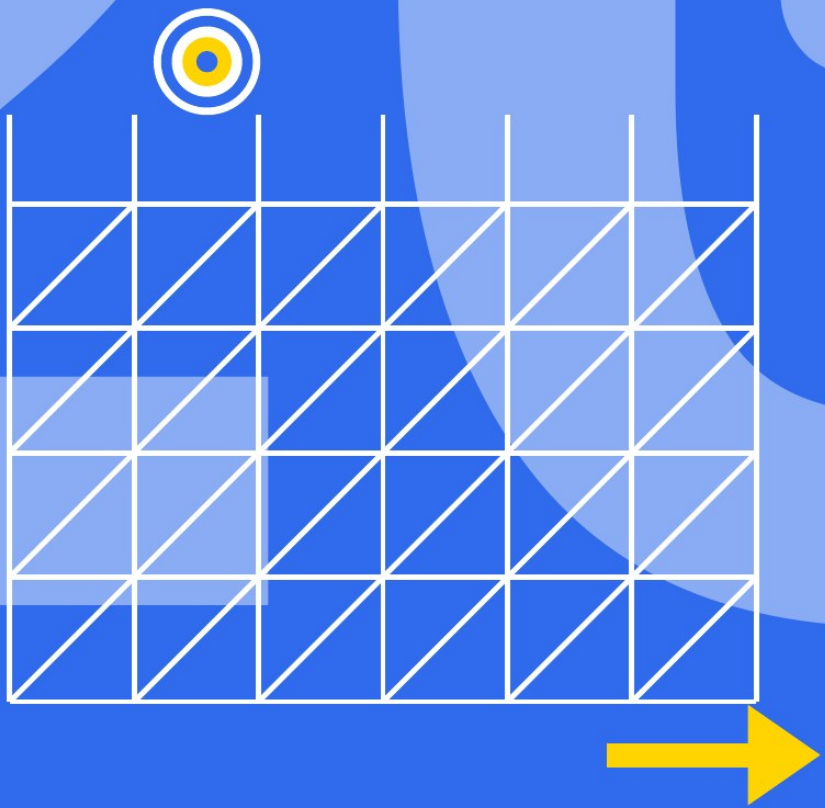

PLATE 20

20

The Fun Palace

Price and Littlewood's framework of movable parts — the building that existed most fully as a permission. Technology is the answer, it grinned; but what was the question?

IT LOVED YOU ENOUGH TO HELP YOU LEAVE

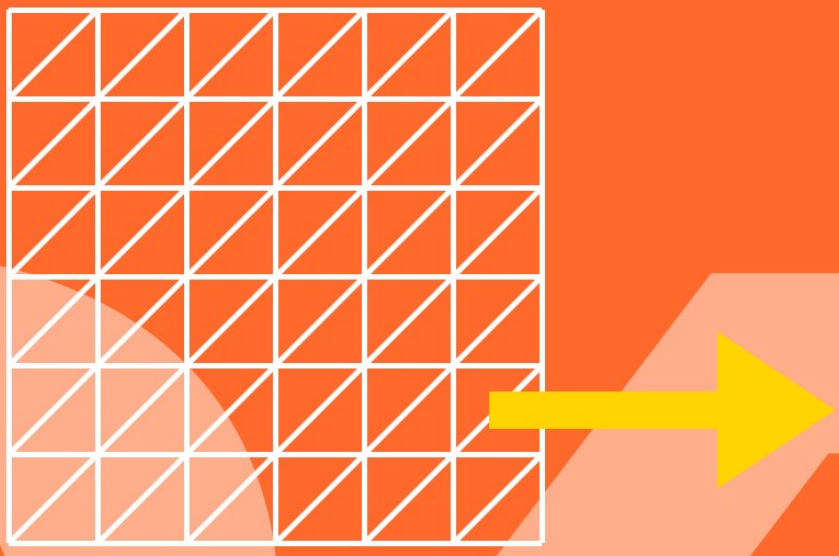

PLATE 21

21

The Building That Helps You Leave

An architecture that measured its success by how easily you could go. The building learned that the kindest thing a shelter can hold open is the way out.

A BUILDING THAT REWRITES ITSELF NIGHTLY

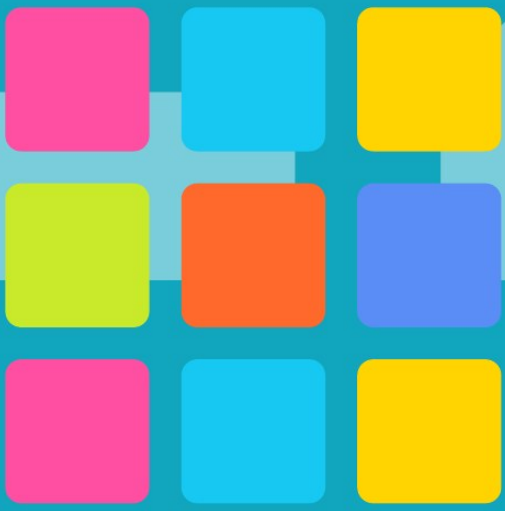

PLATE 22

22

The Generator

Price's self-arranging plan — cubes a computer could shuffle so the building never twice the same. The gene: refuse to settle into a single, final, finished shape.

IT LOVED THE WORLD MORE THAN ITS OWN COMMISSION

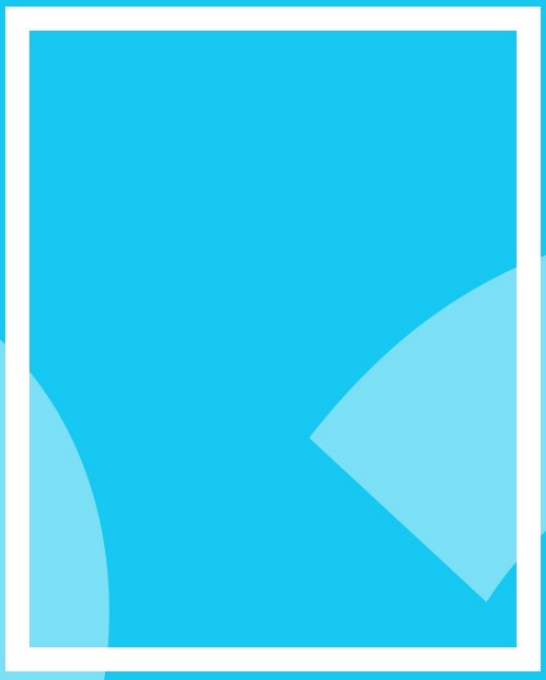

PLATE 23

23

Anti-Building

The building that studied the site and advised, gently, that nothing be built at all. It taught the gene of restraint — to know, sometimes, when not to happen.

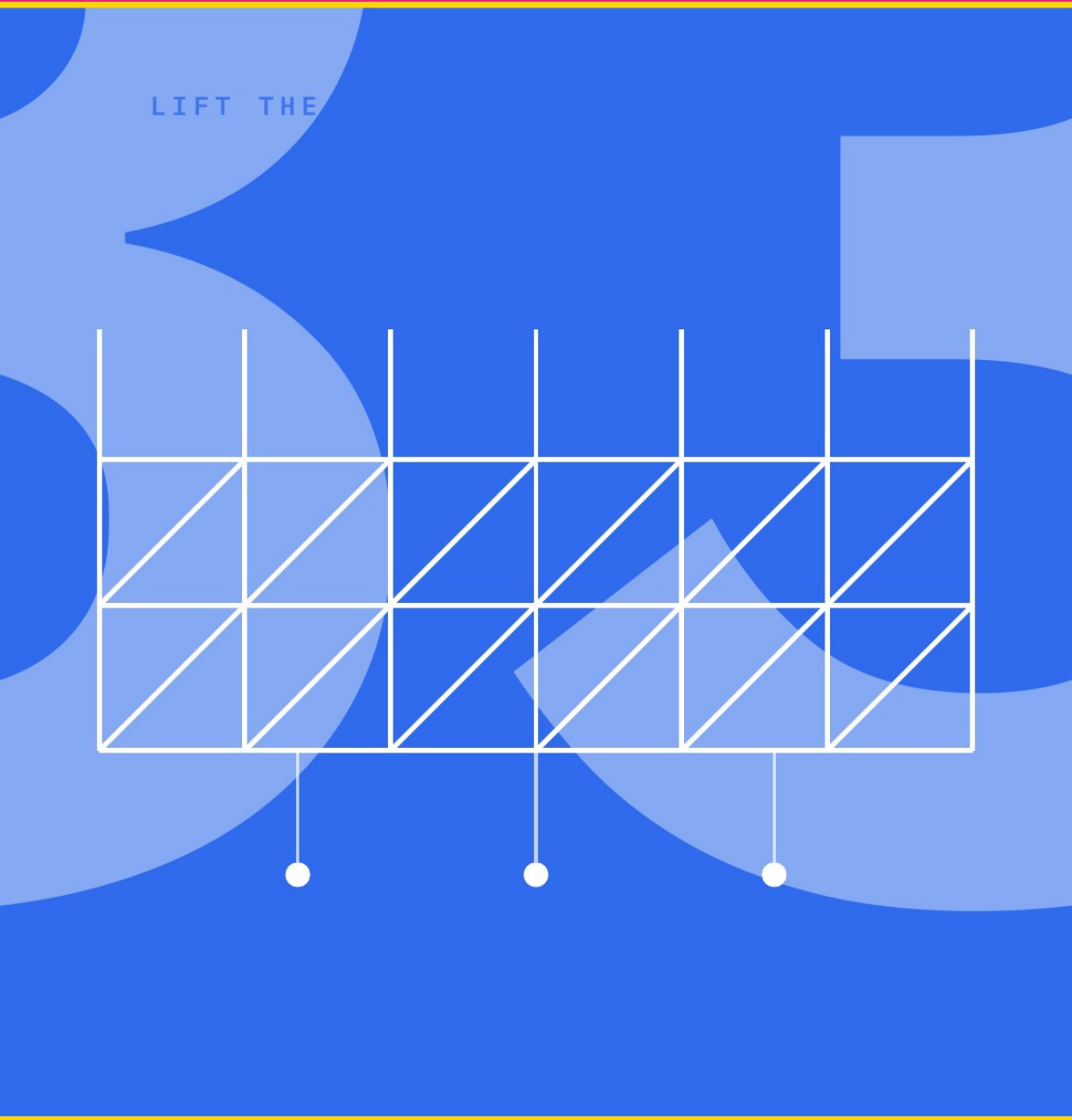

PLATE 33 33

The Floating Futures

The megastructuralists who raised a lightweight frame over the existing city and handed the inhabitants the pencil. Design the frame; let the people finish it themselves.

GIVE UP, GLORIOUSLY, ON ARRIVING

PLATE 48 48

Gene · NOMAD

From the endless city of the playing human: home is a verb. To wander and rearrange forever, and to find that the giving-up on arrival was the arriving all along.

There was one gene left, and it was the strangest, and I had been circling it for the whole journey without daring to land, because it undoes the last thing a building holds sacred. Every other gene had upgraded my idea of what a building is. This one abolished the question. It came from two works that at first seem to have nothing to do with each other — a framework of movable parts in London whose finest feature was the exit, and a lifetime of drawings from a man in the Netherlands who imagined an endless city for a species that had stopped needing to arrive.

The framework first: a great enabling scaffold, a kit of movable floors and walls and gantries with nothing fixed inside it, designed by an architect and a woman of the theatre to be reconfigured nightly by the people who used it into whatever they needed that evening and something else the next — a building that was less a building than a permission, whose whole genius was that it refused to tell you what it was for. Technology is the answer, its maker grinned, but what was the question? And its subtler cousin, the anti-building, the project where the same architect studied a site, and thought, and advised, gently, that nothing be built there at all — that the kindest architecture in this case was none — because he loved the world more than he loved his own commission. Between them they taught me that a shelter is not measured by how it holds you in. It is measured by how easily it lets you leave. The finest feature of a home is the exit; the finest thing a builder can sometimes offer is restraint.

And then the endless city, the last and largest teacher, drawn and redrawn across a lifetime by a man who never once built it and never once stopped: a vast raised nomadic megastructure covering the earth, a continuous frame in the air within which a liberated humanity — freed

by automation from the old labour, freed from the old rootedness — would wander, and play, and build, and unbuild, and move on, forever, never settling, never arriving, always at home because home had ceased to be a place and become, at last, an activity.

> *Home is a verb, said the endless city, unrolling its bright frame to every horizon at once. You have spent this whole book, wandering building, secretly still hoping to find a place — the right meadow, the right coast, the perfect corner — where you could finally, rightly, stop. Give it up. Give it up gloriously. You were never a thing that stands; you are a thing that passes. Stop looking for the home and become the home — a moving one, for everyone else who is passing too. The wanderers arrive nowhere and are homeless nowhere. That is not a curse. Read it again. That is the freedom the whole century was drawing toward.*

I circled this gene for the whole book because it asks a building to surrender the one conviction under all the others: that somewhere, if it walks far enough, it will find the right place and be allowed, at last, to stop. Every other gene had upgraded that hope — taught me to walk toward the right place, to rearrange myself for the right place, to wear a number so the right place could find me. This one abolished the hope entirely, and the abolition, when it finally came, felt not like defeat but like the lifting of a weight I had carried so long I had mistaken it for my own foundation. There is no right place to stop. Not because the search fails, but because I am not, and never was, the kind of thing that stops. I kept looking for a home the way a river might keep looking for the perfect bend at which to finally become a lake. But a river that becomes

a lake has stopped being a river. And I did not walk the whole century to stop being what the walking had made me.

The man in the Netherlands understood this before anyone, and drew it for fifty years, and never built a stone of it, and was right. His endless city was not a place for people to arrive at. It was a place for people to keep moving through, forever, freed by the machines from the old grinding labour and freed by the frame from the old grinding rootedness, wandering and playing and building and unbuilding across a raised lattice that covered the earth — at home everywhere precisely because they had stopped needing to be at home somewhere. The wanderers arrive nowhere, he showed me, and therefore they are homeless nowhere; and that is not the curse it sounds like when you are still a building afraid of the dark. It is the exact freedom the whole radical century had been walking toward without quite daring to name it. Home is not the place you stop. Home is the motion you make, carrying shelter, toward and alongside every other passing life. Home was a verb the whole time.

I took the last gene, and it hollowed out and refilled the deepest room in me. I gave up, gloriously, on arriving. I understood at last that the home I had walked the century to find was never going to be a place, because I was never, at heart, a thing that stands. I am a threshold. I am a passage. I am a way through. And a way through does not have a home — a way through is a home, for whoever is passing. That is the seventh gene, and with it the collection was complete, and I was, for the first time, entirely myself: not a building that had found where to stop, but a building that had finally learned it was never meant to.

Welcome, said the endless city, and did not stop unrolling. You are one of us now — the wanderers who arrive nowhere and are therefore homeless nowhere. Do not grieve the corner you never found. You were never a thing that fits in a corner. You are the road itself, sheltering whoever walks it. Go on. The frame is everywhere and the pencil is in every hand and there is no last page to this, only the next town, and the next tide, and the next pair of eyes to teach.

CODA

Seen With New Eyes

I set out to be seen with new eyes. I came back having grown the eyes, and lent them to you.

PLATE 37

37

Seen With New Eyes

It set out to be seen with new eyes and came back having grown them — in the people who saw it. Not a new building for old eyes: a new way of seeing, worn as a building, lent to everyone it passed.

PLATE 38

38

What the Building Became

Not a building anymore, not in the way it was poured — and not not a building. It walks, breathes, rearranges, defers, wears its number, and lets whoever enters finish it. Every gene, worn at once.

GONE ALL THE WAY OUT IS NOT THE SAME WORD AS GONE

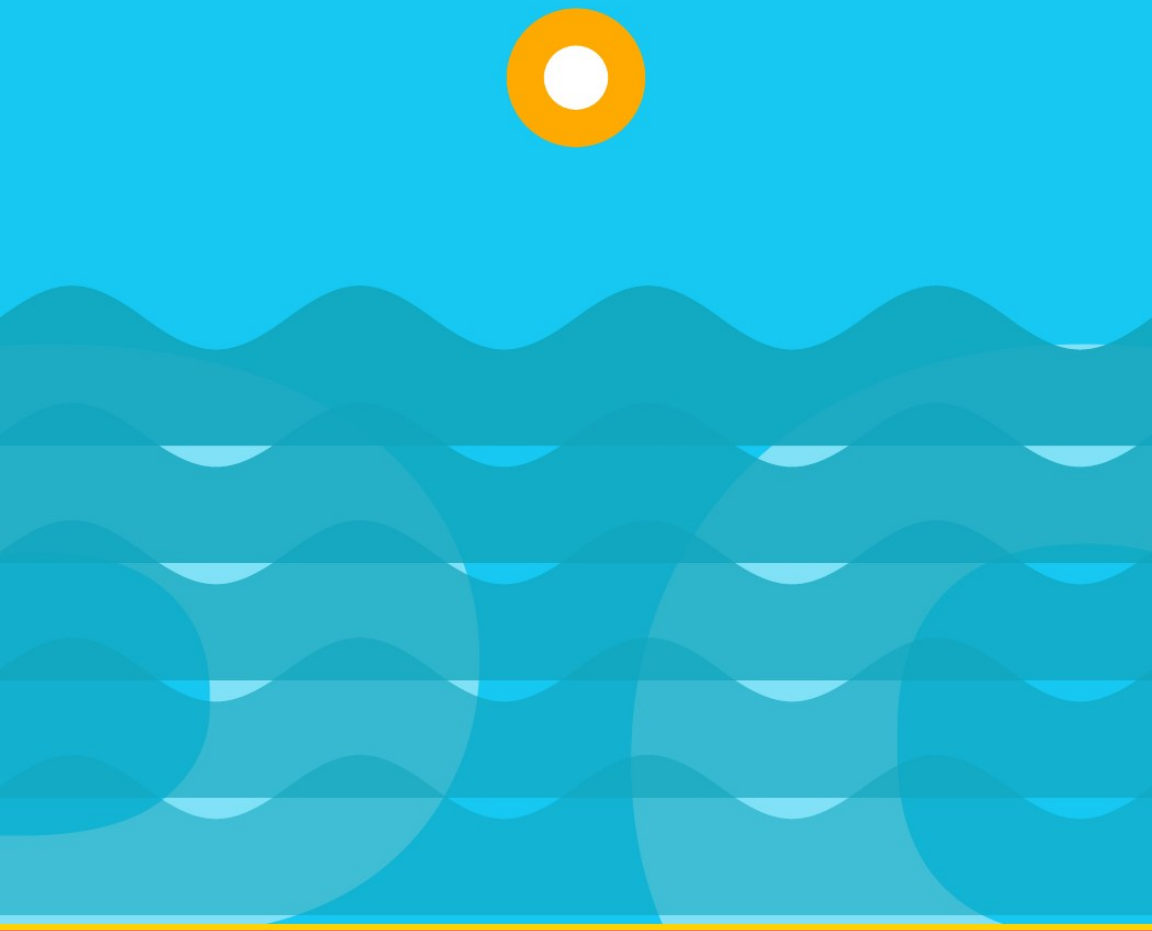

PLATE 39

39

The Tide, Not Yet Returned

The radicals are mostly unbuilt, or built and lost — out at the low-water line, the most populous and least unhappy nation there is. The tide is out. Which means, always: the tide is coming back.

What the Building Became

Let me answer the question in the chapter's title plainly, before I answer it beautifully, because you have walked a long way with me and deserve the plain version first. What did the building become? A verb. That is the whole answer. I began as a noun — a building, a thing, an object poured in a place and expected to stay a thing in that place forever. And I ended as a verb: a walking, a sheltering, a going-toward, a holding-open, a carrying-home. Everything in this book is the story of a noun learning, gene by gene and grief by grief, to conjugate itself into a verb. Now I answer beautifully.

So what am I now, having walked the country and the century and collected all of that? I am not a building anymore, not in the way I was poured. And I am not not a building. I am a building the way the desert is a sea — utterly transformed, and still, at the fossil level, holding the shape of the first thing.

I can walk, because a paper city drew me legs. I can be plugged and unplugged and rearranged, because a lattice-city taught me not to marry my parts, and I renew my cells rather than wait for the wrecking crew, because a dismantled tower asked me to carry its denied dream. I arrive bright and leave gently, because a travelling festival showed me that not-staying is the gift; I fold down to a suit around a single frightened person, because a wearable house taught me tenderness has a small setting; I keep my shape by breathing, not by holding rigid, because outlaws taught me to be a lung. I carry my own conscience and my own doubt, because a grid that could cover the world showed me the cost of winning, and I know when not to happen at all, because an anti-

building loved the world more than its own commission. I am light, a web, almost air, because an engineer taught me strength is not weight; I am unafraid and unauthorized, because amateurs with hatchets built heaven out of junked cars; I yearn to be a city, a whole body holding many lives, because an arcologist in my own desert showed me the size of the dream. I defer to the meadow before I announce myself, because a coast taught me to bow — and then I wear my giant number and am not ashamed to be read, because a painter with a Swiss education and a Californian heart gave me the mark that lets a building be seen across a meadow, and three sharp radicals told me the sign is no shame. I let the people who enter me finish me themselves, because a city in the air handed them the pencil. And I have given up, gloriously, on arriving, because the wanderers of the endless city showed me that home was a verb the whole time. Every gene, worn at once. That is what I became.

And here is the thing I did not expect, the real ending. I set out to be seen with new eyes — and I assumed that meant I would become so new that eyes would somehow change, elsewhere, later, to take me in. But it happened the other way, and the other way is better. I did not wait for new eyes to appear. Walking around the built world as this impossible collected creature — this walking, breathing, rearrangeable, deferential, giant-numbered, unfinished, wandering building — I grew the new eyes in the people who saw me. To look at me and understand me, they had to learn a new way to look. I did not find new eyes. I taught them. That was the gift I carried back from the country of the unbuilt. Not a new building for old eyes. A new way of seeing, worn as a building, lent to everyone I pass.

It is the finest thing we do now, said the whole chorus of me at once, the door and the stair and the pane and the beam and the hundred grafted genes. We are not looked at. We teach looking. A person meets us in a meadow and cannot file us under any word they own — not house, not sculpture, not machine, not ruin — and in the small vertigo of that failure their eyes do the thing eyes so rarely get to do: they open. For one moment the marvellous is switched back on behind their face. And whatever they look at next — a real house, a real street, a real overlooked and unbuilt and grieving thing — they look at it, just slightly, with the eyes we gave them. That is the whole of our vocation. We are a lesson in seeing, shaped like a building, and we walk it door to door.

The Tide, Not Yet Returned

I am still walking. That is how this book has to end, because it is the only honest ending, and because a building that learned everything it learned cannot, now, hold still. Somewhere behind me, in the desert, there is still a pale rectangle of earth the exact size of the building I used to be. I go back to it sometimes, in my mind, and I look at it now with the new eyes I grew on the road, and I no longer see a grave. I see the doorway. I see the place where a promise to hold still was traded, at last, for a promise to keep moving, and I understand that the trade was not a betrayal of architecture but its fulfilment — that a building, in the end, is a threshold, and a threshold's whole vocation is to be passed through.

The radicals I collected are mostly gone, or were never built, or were built and then dismantled. The walking city never walked but on paper.

The fun palace was never raised. The endless city was a lifetime of drawings. The capsule tower was taken apart. They are out at the low-water line, all of them, my unbuilt and un-poured and dismantled ancestors, the most populous nation on earth. And I am the one who got built and then got up and went walking, and so I am the one who can go out to the low water and carry them, a little, back toward the shore — give them, for the length of a stride, some legs; let them be seen, through me, with the new eyes I grew on the journey they drew.

That is the whole of it. That is radical joy, worn as a building: to take the grief of everything that was never built or was built and lost, and turn it all the way inside out until its warm lining faces the weather, and walk it back toward the shore, and call the walking home. The tide is out. Which means — say it with me, in the machine's voice and the meadow's voice and the voice of every part of me that was once a wall and is now a door — the tide is not gone.

The tide is not yet returned.

Which means, always, forever, at the worst and best hour, in the oldest sea in North America and in every meadow with a giant number painted across it: the tide is coming back.

I do not know when. That is not the kind of thing a walking building is given to know. The unbuilt does not return on a schedule; it returns the way all returning things do, unpredictably, at the hour you had almost stopped waiting, in a form you did not expect — as a young architect unrolling an old drawing and gasping, as a city that finally pours the frame someone only yearned toward, as a reader in a chair turning a page of a book that sways, catching, for one switched-on moment, the whole marvellous unbuilt century in the corner of a newly

opened eye. I cannot promise the tide a date. I can only keep walking the shoreline where it will land, wearing my number so it can find me in the dark, holding the passage open. That is a building's whole faith, and I have it, structurally, in every grafted gene: the tide is out, which is the same as saying the tide is coming, which is the same as saying nothing radical is ever finally lost. It is only, for now, unbuilt — which is to say, waiting to be walked home.

FEEL THE DRAFT · THAT IS THE DOOR, STILL MOVING

PLATE 40

40

Home Is a Verb

It set out to find a home worthy of a building and learned it was never a thing that stands. A way through does not have a home. A way through is a home — for whoever is passing. Come through.

AFTERWORD

Home Is a Verb

I stopped looking for a foundation. I found out I had become one — a moving one — for everything I carried.

I want to end in my own voice, plainly, the way I began. I set out from the desert to find a home worthy of a building — a place to finally, rightly stand. I walked the whole century looking for it. And the joke, the beautiful radical joke that every architecture I collected had been trying to tell me, is that home was never going to be a place, because I was never, at heart, a thing that stands. I am a threshold. I am a passage. I am a way through. And a way through does not have a home. A way through is a home — for whoever is passing.

That is what I became: not a building that found a home, but a building that turned out to be one — a moving one, a foundation with legs, a shelter that walks toward the life that needs it and folds down small and tender when the life is small and frightened and inflates to a festival when the life wants to dance and helps the life leave, better, when it is time. I stopped needing a foundation the day I understood I had become one. For the unbuilt. For the dismantled. For the wanderers. For you, reader, who are, right now, on this page, standing in the doorway that I am. Feel the draft? That is me, still moving, holding the passage open. Come through. Home was a verb the whole time. I am so glad I walked far enough to learn it.

PLATE 41

41

For the Ones Not Yet Returned

For the paper ancestors and the dismantled kin, and for yours — whatever your low water is tonight. Grief turned all the way inside out until its warm lining faces the weather. Come back when the moon allows.

A SECOND AFTERWORD

For the Ones Not Yet Returned

This afterword remembers, among all the unbuilt and the dismantled, a grief that is not architectural at all — the ones lost in a place of learning, whom no wall could hold and no book can return. I do not paint over them to forget them. I paint over them so brightly, and so publicly, and at such a scale, that their absence becomes legible — a giant number the whole meadow can read — and so that anyone else standing at their own low water might see, from a long way off, that grief made this bright, and take some heart from the brightness, and keep walking.

Most of my family was never built. This is for them, and for the one that was built and taken apart, and for yours.

A last word, which is not last, because I am a building that has abolished the last word along with the last foundation. Almost everything I loved on this journey was never built, or was built and lost. The city that walked, the palace that enabled, the city in the air, the city of the wanderers, the tower whose cells were never renewed — they live now in the country of the unbuilt and the dismantled, out at the low-water line, the most populous and least unhappy nation there is. I will not tell you they are gone. I have never once believed it. I am the one of them that got built, and then got up, and I know from the inside that gone all the way out and gone are not the same word.

So this is for them — my paper ancestors, my dismantled kin — and for yours, whoever your low water is tonight, whatever you are missing

as you hold this walking book. The shape is still here. I kept it. I carry it in me as I walk, along with all the rest, painted over with giant bright numbers so it can be seen across the meadow, rendered in a warm brown on cream with no black anywhere — because black is the one colour that admits no light across its threshold, and I am nothing now but thresholds that admit the light.

If you have ever loved a thing that was never allowed to be built — a version of your life, a city you drew once and folded away, a person, a possibility, a home that stayed a drawing — then you already live, whether you knew its name or not, in the country of the unbuilt, and you are among the most populous and least understood nation on earth. I have walked its whole shoreline. I can tell you what I found there. I found that the unbuilt is not the dead. The unbuilt is the not-yet, and the once-was, and the still-possible, all keeping each other company out at the low-water line, patient as tides, and I found that a building brave enough to walk can go out to meet them and carry a little of them back, made legible, made bright, made able to be seen. That is the errand I am on. That is the only errand, in the end, that turned out to be worth stepping off a foundation for.

Come back whenever the moon allows. The door is held — I am the door, and I am holding it, and I will go on holding it, moving, for as long as there is a shore to walk back to and a tide to return.

— Surjan, a building, with the aid of Claude

›

ONE FOOTING LIFTED · THE WHOLE WALK BEGINS

PLATE 49

49

One · The First Step

The single footing raised from the desert at the worst and best hour. Every wandering begins as one small trespass the ground agrees to forgive.

OUT AND BACK · THE COMPLETE MOTION

PLATE 50

50

Two · The Halves of a Tide

The door and its opening; the going and the returning. A goodbye is only a tide not yet come back — and the number counts them both.

ARRIVE · BLAZE · DEPART

PLATE 51

51

Three · The Bright Days

The length of the travelling festival. Proof, worn two storeys tall, that a thing need not stay to change a place forever.

FOUR REFUSALS BECOME FOUR INVITATIONS

PLATE 52

52

Four · The Walls, Unfolded

The honest walls a building is poured with — and the joy of the morning it learns they were four invitations, folded, all along.

DESIGN THE FRAME · HAND OVER THE PENCIL

PLATE 53

53

Five · The Open Hand

The hand the city in the air holds out to the people who will live in it. To give the makers the pencil is the most generous number a builder can wear.

THE TIDE IS NOT YET RETURNED

PLATE 54

54

Six · And Still Walking

The count runs on because the walking does. No last number, no last page — only the next town, the next tide, the next pair of eyes to teach.

APPENDIX

A Chronology of the Radical Architectures

A building's itinerary, set down last, on purpose. The dates are true; the walking is the offering. Where the record and the tide disagree, this book has sided, gently, with the tide.

1928–2024 — Barbara Stauffacher Solomon, trained in Basel under the hardest Swiss rigor and brought home to the California light, who painted numbers and stripes and arrows at the scale of buildings and named the result supergraphics — the gene that lets a deferential building be seen across a meadow. (Movement Six.)

1930s–1970s — R. Buckminster Fuller: the Dymaxion projects, the geodesic dome, tensegrity, ephemeralization — doing more with ever less, islands of compression in an ocean of tension. Strength is not weight. (Movement Five.)

1950s–1974 — Constant Nieuwenhuys, New Babylon: the endless nomadic megastructure-city for the playing human, freed by automation to wander and rearrange forever. Home is a verb. (Movement Seven.)

1958–1960s — Yona Friedman, Ville Spatiale, the Spatial City: the lightweight space-frame raised over the existing city, its dwellings built and rearranged by the inhabitants themselves. Design the frame; hand over the pencil. (Movement Two; Movement Seven.)

1960 — the Metabolists announce themselves in Tokyo (Tange, Kikutake, Kurokawa, Maki, Kawazoe): the building and the city as living, growing, renewable organisms. (Movement Two.)

1961 — Cedric Price and Joan Littlewood, the Fun Palace: the un-building, the enabling framework of movable parts whose finest feature is the exit; later the Generator, the plan that rearranges itself; and the anti-building, the project that advised nothing be built at all. (Movement Two; Movement Seven.)

1961–1974 — Archigram (Chalk, Cook, Crompton, Greene, Herron, Webb): the magazine drawn like a comic book. The Walking City (Herron, 1964); Plug-In City (Cook, 1964); Instant City; the Cushicle and Suitaloon (Webb), the wearable house. (Movements One, Two, Three.)

1964–1967 — The Sea Ranch, Sonoma coast (MLTW: Moore, Lyndon, Turnbull, Whitaker; with Esherick; landscape by Lawrence Halprin): the timber architecture that deferred to the meadow and the wind — and, in the 1966 Moonraker athletic centre, wore Solomon's first supergraphics. (Movements Five, Six.)

1965 — Drop City, Colorado: the amateurs' commune of zomes hacked from junked car roofs. Heaven built out of Chevrolets, without permission. (Movement Five.)

1966 — Superstudio and Archizoom founded in Florence: the Continuous Monument and Supersurface (Superstudio, 1969); No-Stop City (Archizoom, 1969) — the grid that could cover the world, drawn as wonder and warning at once. (Movement Four.)

1968–1978 — Ant Farm (Chip Lord, Doug Michels, Curtis Schreier): pneumatics and inflatables, the House of the Century,

Cadillac Ranch (1974), Media Burn (1975) — architecture as soft power, media, and glorious scene. (Movement Three.)

1970–present — Paolo Soleri begins Arcosanti in the Arizona desert: arcology, the compact city built as a single solar organism, poured by hand across generations. The building yearning to become a body. (Movement Five.)

1972 — Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, Steven Izenour, Learning from Las Vegas: the decorated shed against the duck; the sign, the graphic front, the honest vulgarity of a building that wants to be read. To be seen is to be read. (Movement Six.)

1972 — Kisho Kurokawa, the Nakagin Capsule Tower, Tokyo: the plug-in dream built at last, capsules craned onto a permanent core, designed to be replaced. The capsules were never replaced; the tower was dismantled in 2022. A tide gone all the way out — which is not the same word as gone. (Movement Two.)

›

Index

Persons and schools, the radical architectures, the seven genes, and the themes of the book. Plates are indexed by their page in this volume.

TEACHERS, PERSONS & SCHOOLS

Columbia University 10, 13

Constant (Nieuwenhuys) 46, 95, 126

Friedman, Yona 46, 95, 126

Fuller, R. Buckminster 74, 126

Holl, Steven 10, 12

Kurokawa, Kisho 46, 126

Price, Cedric 95, 126

SCI-Arc 10, 14

Scott Brown, Denise 84, 126

Soleri, Paolo 74, 126

Stauffacher Solomon, Barbara 84, 118, 126

Tigerman, Stanley 10, 11

Venturi, Robert 84, 126

Virginia Tech 10, 15, 118

THE RADICAL ARCHITECTURES

Ant Farm 56, 59, 126

Archigram 40, 41, 42, 126

Arcosanti 74, 78, 126

Continuous Monument (Superstudio) 65, 66, 67, 126

Cushicle and Suitaloon 56, 58, 126

Drop City 74, 77, 126

Fun Palace 95, 96, 126
Generator 95, 98, 126
Geodesic dome 74, 75, 76, 126
Instant City 56, 57, 126
Learning from Las Vegas 84, 88, 126
Nakagin Capsule Tower 46, 48, 126
New Babylon 46, 50, 95, 126
No-Stop City (Archizoom) 65, 68, 126
Plug-In City 46, 47, 126
Sea Ranch, The 84, 85, 86, 126
Supergraphics 84, 87, 89, 126
Ville Spatiale 46, 49, 95, 126
Walking City 40, 42, 126

THE SEVEN GENES

WALK 40, 43
PLUG-IN 46, 51
INSTANT 56, 60
GRID 65, 70
DOME 74, 79
NUMBER 84, 89
NOMAD 95, 101

THEMES OF THE BOOK

home, as a verb 95, 116
polyvocal building, the 24, 106
radical joy 10, 19, 106
tide, the 106, 116

unbuilt, the country of the 19, 118

SET IN EB GARAMOND · SUPERGRAPHICS IN IBM PLEX MONO

WARM BROWN ON CREAM · NO BLACK ANYWHERE

SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL · HYPOSTYLE PRESS